

**Exploring the Use of the Humanities:
Towards Transformative Dialogue on Educational Issues**

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Abstract

This dissertation used an original fable to explore how the humanities might be used to inform readers about educational issues and promote dialogue among groups of educational stakeholders. Along with the fable, *The Foal and the Ranch*, I have described tools with which to recognize and overcome policy fallacies. Additionally, I have provided evidence to support the events represented in the fable and to further enhance the conversation about justice, fairness, and equity in public education as purported in Saskatchewan public education documents. The purpose of this study was to explore the use of a fable as an instrument of the humanities towards creating personal transformation of understanding and meaningful dialogue on educational issues.

For this study, 11 participants were divided into three relatively homogeneous discussion groups. The first group was comprised of three teacher candidates, the second group was made up of five experienced educators who were also doctoral candidates, and the third group consisted of three parents who each had children attending public schools. Participants read the fable individually, completed a pre-discussion survey, engaged in a group discussion, and then completed a post-discussion survey.

The findings indicated that perceived individual transformation related to understanding as a result of reading and discussing the fable varied greatly and seemed to be inversely related to the amount of experience that the participants had had with educational systems. Those with vast experience (administrators/teachers) felt they had experienced minor transformation, those with moderate experience (teacher candidates) showed moderate transformation, and those with little experience (parents) indicated considerable transformation. The experienced teachers felt affirmed by the fable, the teacher candidates felt frustrated, and the parents said they simultaneously felt validated, outraged, and overwhelmed. All groups felt that the fable would be beneficial toward engaging stakeholders in productive dialogue concerning educational issues. The dialogue among participants was measured according to Bloom's Taxonomy for affective learning and all three groups stayed primarily in the lower three levels of affective learning: receiving, responding, and valuing.

Research findings corroborated existing theories advocating the usefulness of the humanities to function as both a mirror to see one's self as well as window through which to view the world. The stakeholders that were included in this study indicated a belief that there is

a disconnect between educational policies and practices, implying that informed dialogue is necessary and that constructs such as the fable used in this study may support understanding. Implications relate to the usefulness of the humanities as a tool in supporting change in Education. Further research is necessary in exploring what actual change might transpire as a result of humanities-inspired dialogue.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family.

Alexis: Your lovely smile reflects the beauty inside of you. You are fun, witty, playful, and caring...and can you ever bake! From you I have learned to value spending time with people and making them feel special.

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Chapter 1: The Purpose and Significance of this Study

This chapter provides the background for this dissertation, the research questions I have answered, as well as the significance of this study. The background is presented as a double-story. I begin by recounting my family's navigations through the educational system on behalf of our exceptional child. Subsequently, I describe my personal journey that inspired the creation of the fable, *The Foal and the Ranch*. After establishing these contexts, I provide an explanation of the problem and the research questions I sought to answer. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief description of how the dissertation is organized.

Outside of Inclusion

To understand the genesis of this dissertation, I will recount the experiences my family has had with the educational system. Having a gifted child has had implications on our family as a whole and on me individually. I will first provide the story of our son's education within the context of our family, and then I will describe how these experiences have impacted me personally.

Our Story

My interest in this study began fifteen years ago when our first two children were born – twin boys. Although born slightly premature and therefore, slightly small, they were both healthy and beautiful. Not long after birth, however, my wife and I began to notice behaviours in the second-born twin that did not seem normal. For example, when he was one year old, he seemed unaware of things in his environment. If other children were playing nearby, he was more than uninterested, he was oblivious to them. He would often sit with his back to any action in the room and simply hold two rings or spin the wheels of toy cars. My wife and I discussed the possibilities of him having a hearing problem and had him tested. Upon examination, it was discovered that our son had blockages in his ears that required tubes to be surgically inserted. While his ears may have been causing him some discomfort, his abnormal behaviour continued, and we concluded that his hearing was not the problem. Silently, we wondered about autism.

Our suspicions of autism grew during his second year. Our son was fixated on bizarre things: he would open and close his bedroom door dozens of times in a row, and when we went to his grandparents' house, he would run into the living room and stare at their glass-topped coffee table (we later realized that he was looking at the reflection of the ceiling fan as it spun). Also concerning us around this time was his unemotional attitude toward others; he often seemed

distant and indifferent to those around him. By age two he could recite the alphabet, both forward and backward. He could also tell us not only the contents of many books we had read to him, he could accurately state the specific page number on which a certain event was written. Looking back, I am not surprised that my son ignited an interest in special education that has directed my life for many years. I am, however, surprised at the specific branch of special education on which I have focused because of his special needs.

By three years old, our son was a fluent reader and could spell many words. As we walked through Walmart he would ride in the cart and look up reciting what he saw on the signs above: “*hardware...sporting goods...ladies apparel.*” He also began to do basic math. By the time he started kindergarten at age five, he could read and understand most adult books and could add, subtract, and multiply to two or three digits. During this same time period, he also began to mature emotionally and became incredibly cognizant and compassionate towards the feelings of others. We were now fully aware that we had an academically gifted child.

Realizing the advantage a gifted child would have in school and in life, most parents would likely be elated at the realization that their boy or girl had greater academic abilities than most children their age, and we were no exception. Our excitement, however, was short-lived as we soon came up against resistance from the school system. Suddenly, my wife and I felt very alone. We had not anticipated the tremendous burden that had been placed upon us as parents because of our son’s giftedness. The possibility of my wife and me squandering such a precious gift in our son would be an immoral act that both of us were fearful of committing. We soon discovered, however, how easy his gift could be wasted if we left the education of our son to the discretion of the school.

In spite of the fact that I was a junior high teacher in the K – 12 school my two sons attended, I was not aware of how the education system addressed young children who were beyond the achievement levels of their peers. Additionally, because our twin boys were our first children, my wife and I did not want to be seen as biased parents who thought their child was special. As a result, we decided to allow the kindergarten teacher to discover our son’s giftedness for herself and to initiate the differentiation he required. Within weeks, his teacher acknowledged his giftedness, but after several months it became clear that unless we intervened, neither the system, nor the people in it, would make any adjustments for him. Even with our intervention, we did not know if anything would be done for our exceptional child.

Our son had the same teacher for first grade as he had for kindergarten, so early in his grade one year we approached the principal with anecdotal evidence including the teacher's statement that, "This school has never had a student like this...in over 25 years of teaching, I have never seen anything like him." We asked that our son's cognitive abilities be tested. Our request was denied. The principal rejected our appeal saying, "I have been in education nearly 30 years, and I have seen advanced kindergarten kids before. He is just a fast worker...by grade three, they are all the same." Not knowing what else we could do or where else we could turn, we submitted to his judgement and did not pursue any alternatives that year.

The following year brought a new principal into the school and our request for testing was approved. Due to the backlog of testing requests submitted to the Province, however, testing for giftedness was given a low priority and our son was not tested until near the end of the school year. As we expected, he tested several years ahead of the norms in nearly every category. The representative from the Province advised my wife and me that we could help his development by encouraging him to journal and maybe, in a few years, he could join a debate team. These two suggestions were the first and only recommendations we were given. We are unsure if the person conducting the tests shared the results with school administrators, but in spite of the fact that that our son's teacher was present for the meeting, nothing in the classroom changed. Our son was given no opportunity to journal and no other enrichment opportunities.

Not only was the school staff neglecting to enable our child to reach his potential, they were not even trying to comprehend what his potential might be. Unwilling to allow our son's gift to perish without a fight, my wife and I took it upon ourselves to discover if we could get an idea of his academic ability in one area. For the first month in the summer after his grade two year, we had our son work on math workbooks for one hour a day, five days a week. In those 20 hours, and without the help of us or a teacher, he easily accelerated two grade levels. With this information in hand, we returned to the school in the fall hoping to discuss our son's educational options. Instead of dialogue, we were again met with indifference, and nothing was done.

After several frustrating years of having the school ignore his needs and teachers discouraging us from pursuing alternative instruction, beginning in grade five we chose to homeschool our two sons. Among the other advantages of individualizing instruction for our children, homeschooling afforded our sons the opportunity to join the homeschoolers' debate club. In spite of debate being one of only two activities recommended to us by the provincial

tester, it was only offered by two elementary schools in Saskatoon, and neither school was located near our home. As a team, our two sons were very successful in debate for several years. Along with many tournament wins and Top Speaker awards, they also won Provincials and competed at Canadian Nationals. After my older twin returned to school, my academically gifted son teamed up with a new partner and again won the Provincial tournament and competed at Nationals. The years our children were homeschooled were fantastic years for our family and for our children individually, but the time came when our twin boys wanted to spend more time around kids their own age.

By age thirteen, both boys wanted to enter grade eight at school. We inquired at the school where our younger two children attended (this was a different school than the one my twins had attended several years earlier). In the end, one twin was accepted, our gifted son was not. The principal did not feel that school resources allowed him or his staff to accommodate our child's exceptionality. Instead, we met with the University of Saskatchewan and our son was conditionally accepted into Open Studies. Just three weeks after his thirteenth birthday, he began two online university courses (English 110 and Economics 111) and he continued to homeschool.

After "grade eight" we again inquired about our son attending school with his twin brother and other two siblings. Citing a successful year at home and university (he had completed 4 classes that year – 12 credits with a 75% average), we asked that he attend regular grade nine classes half-time and allowed to pursue online university courses during the other half. The principal rejected our request but seemed willing to accept our son as a *normal* grade nine student. We did not feel this was in the best interest of our son and so, with our son waiting outside the principal's office; we were told by the principal, "Take him home, there is nothing we can do for him here." We left the office, and for the benefit of our son, I forced a smile, and took him home for another year of homeschooling.

During his grade nine year, he completed six more university courses, and by April he had completed the first year of university with an average in the high 70s. However, his demeanor was changing. Our son, normally a high-spirited happy boy, was becoming sullen, withdrawn, and moody. He just wanted to fit in. He wanted to be normal. This was when we first discovered "the curse of giftedness:" a child resents his or her gift because it makes him or her different. Our son just wanted to be like his friends, but he was not like his friends. In a

school system designed around same-aged class groupings, he was destined to be an oddity. His level of thinking made it impossible for him to truly fit in because intellectually, he was above his same-aged peers, but he was physically behind those he could relate to academically. This is a paradox that many of those close to us did not understand. Simply putting him in his age-similar classroom would not make him normal and solve all his problems.

In the summer prior to grade ten, my wife and I had determined that our son's desire to try to be normal had become the priority. In spite of regular interaction with debaters and other kids his age from various sports and other activities, he felt he had no real friends. Even though he had now successfully completed one full year of university, we were willing to have him forego an appropriate education and simply attend grade 10 with his brother in hopes of developing friendships and fulfilling his social needs. It was at this time that the irony of the situation became clear: For the sake of our son's well-being, we were willing to sacrifice his academic potential by placing him in the school system that specifically promised to have him reach his full potential. There was (is) a problem here.

Our greatest fear in allowing my son to enter regular high school was not the lost time he could have used accumulating university credits or the delay it would cause in earning his undergrad degree. As a high school teacher, I knew that most classrooms catered to the norm or, in an effort to have all students *succeed*, the lowest common denominator. For our son, this meant that he would have to expend little time or effort to master the material and attain high grades. Not only would this create a false reality for him, but my fear was that his disciplined work ethic would be forever lost due to lack of use. Further, normally effective teaching strategies, such as repetition, can be like fingernails on a chalkboard to academically gifted children who grasp the concept the first time it is taught. We were willing to accept a university graduation date two or three years later than it had to be, but at the first sign of our son developing slack work habits or a bad attitude from boredom in class, we were going to revisit our options.

When we met with the school administrators this time, we were pleasantly surprised as they were willing to accommodate us. Our son is currently working on grade 10 curricula in the mornings and three university courses in the afternoons. Although the principal has said our son will not be allowed to graduate with his classmates after grade 12 (insufficient credits), or participate in graduation festivities, we were grateful for the accommodation. We are pleased

with the arrangement as it allows our son to be with his peers in the morning and do appropriate level work in the afternoon, so his work habits remain strong. To date, all the marks he has earned this year from both high school and university have been in the 90s. We are only half-way through the school semester, and two-thirds of the way through the university term, but, so far, the arrangement seems to be working very well for everyone.

My Story

Concurrent with these events, in an effort to help my son, I began to pursue my own education with hopes of determining how I could advocate for my son and those like him. The year after our sons started homeschooling, I entered university in the pursuit of my Bachelor of Education Degree. As I read ministry, divisional, and school policies, I saw an inclusive system that guaranteed an appropriate education, accommodated *all* students, and promised to help each and every one maximize his or her potential. This, however, was not the educational system I was experiencing as a teacher or a parent, and I wanted to discover why.

As I delved into the purpose of education in Saskatchewan, I soon discovered that the Ministry and most school divisions have a stated purpose of having all children reach their full potential. Further, students designated as “special needs” (which includes giftedness) are entitled to supports and resources required to enable them to reach their full potential. In short, as stated in the Saskatchewan *Education Act (1995)*, “Every person...has the right to receive instruction appropriate to that person’s...educational achievement” [Emphasis added] (Sec. 142). As this was not our experience, I had to look further.

Some of the roadblocks to appropriate education for gifted students that I found were legislated into existence in such documents as the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)* and the *Education Act (1995)*. Others pertained to funding policies which allocate money to school divisions for gifted students but do not designate on whom the money is to be spent. Therefore, additional funding tends to go to serve those for whom schools are most held accountable – the students struggling to attain grade-level achievement. Additionally, gifted students are often ignored due to the misconception that they can take care of themselves and/or should not be doubly blessed by receiving additional supports on top of their innate endowments.

As my study progressed, I came to realize that the goal of having each child reach his or her full potential is a flawed premise that, among other things, runs contrary to the goal of reducing the achievement gap. Under the current system, individual potential is not measured,

so outcomes have no standard for comparison, therefore, success cannot be determined. Similarly, when there is no standard for comparison, failure is also difficult to prove.

In the areas that were being measured – achievement compared to same-aged peers – Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores indicated that Saskatchewan students were doing progressively worse (Statistics Canada, 2010). The Organization of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) has reported that during the last decade, in Saskatchewan, the number of low-achieving students has grown, while the number of high-achieving students has declined at an even faster (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2010). Failing to properly address educational issues has serious consequences for society as nearly every person is affected by K- 12 policies in Saskatchewan.

Because of my experience home-schooling my own children, I also became aware of the stringent rules and harsh penalties that the Ministry of Education imposed on families who chose to home-school their children. While parents are allowed a wide berth in how they choose to educate their children, the Province maintains the right to test the children on mandated learning objectives and judge the outcomes according to Provincial standards. If a home-schooled child fails to meet the standards set by the Province, the family may lose the privilege of home-educating their own kids, and the children may be forced to enter public school. It occurred to me that in articulating the standard of education that would be deemed unacceptable to the Province, the Ministry had also provided a benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of public schools. Because the Ministry asserts that the education of all children in Saskatchewan is a compelling interest of the state (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, pp. 11, 14, 26), it is reasonable to apply the same standards to every educational institution in the Province. I believe that if home-school standards and policies were applied and enforced on public school teachers, many students would be removed from the classroom and some schools would likely be forced to shut down. Home-based education policies and how they were represented in *The Foal and the Ranch* will be examined in detail in Chapter Four.

In summation, as I searched to find answers for my own son I found policies and practices in the educational system that were not congruent with the purpose of education in the Province. I discovered that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, school divisions, and public schools, had set goals certain goals for students that had no standard for measurement and were impossible to achieve. These unrealistic expectations will be examined extensively in Part

I of Chapter Three. Meanwhile, student achievement scores on standardized tests, the one thing that was measured, indicated that these overall scores were declining in the Province (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2010). The most drastic decline was evident in the number of students who were no longer capable of reaching the highest achievement levels. Based on the declining achievement levels of students in the Province, I believe that if policies and consequences ordering home-based educators were applied to public school educators, many children would be removed from classrooms. Finally, I found that funding limitations are only rarely acknowledged in educational policy, yet that limited funding obviously affects educational decisions and programming.

In spite of all these incongruences, I found few people willing to discuss these issues with me in a realistic fashion. While I was not entirely surprised to discover the general ignorance among parents with respect school policies and practices (as I had myself been ignorant), I was surprised at the level of indifference parents seemed to have toward how their children's schools and classrooms were being operated. However, perhaps most shocking, was how those who had been educated and were employed by the public educational system seemed to be oblivious or indifferent to the reality of the situations they daily witnessed. While teachers readily admitted that they "taught to the bottom" or knew gifted students were bored in their classrooms, they displayed no indication that they felt this may be ethically wrong or even that it was contrary to policy; it was simply a fact. I determined that I would endeavour to create an instrument that would help bridge the gap between ignorance and knowledge; between the layperson and the professional; and, perhaps most importantly, between silence and conversation.

The Researcher

Throughout this project, I functioned in three distinct roles: the role of parent/teacher/advocate, author of a fictional story, and a researcher. My position as parent/teacher/advocate began as I recounted my family's navigation through the educational system and continues in the following paragraphs. In Chapter Two, I describe myself in the role of author and the persona(s) I employed in creating an instrument for my research and providing a toolkit for stakeholders as they engage in dialogue on educational issues. Finally, in Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six, I assume the role of researcher. To begin, the following will provide my background and experience as a parent and teacher and how that experience may have influenced my research.

In the past ten years, I have earned my Bachelor of Education and Master of Education degrees, taught in both independent and public schools, and served on a local school board. All four of my children currently attend an associate public school. Three of my children have been homeschooled for at least one year with one of them being homeschooled for five years. In addition, one of my children is academically gifted and is co-enrolled in high school and university.

As a parent, a teacher in the public education system, a home-school educator, a student in the College of Education Undergraduate Program, and a Grad Student in Educational Administration, I have personally experienced a disconnect between policies and practices in the educational system. It is these discrepancies that led me to investigate the laws and policies governing Saskatchewan schools.

Overall, I have a vested interest in the results of this study, the same as any other educator or parent would have. My interest may be slightly greater as I am an educator, a parent of school-aged children, and because one of my children is a student with an exceptionality (giftedness). Therefore, if this study brought about change that was beneficial to educators, parents, students, or gifted students, I would certainly benefit. The change would have to be rapid for me to directly benefit as a parent because my children will begin to graduate in the next few years.

Statement of the Problem and the Purpose of the Study

The problem I addressed in this study relates to the apparent lack of meaningful dialogue among educational stakeholders concerning important educational issues. The environment surrounding education is constantly changing. Concerned parties must continually re-evaluate the educational system based on the intended and unintended outcomes that result from policy changes, and must repeatedly examine school practices with respect to equity, efficiency, efficacy, freedom, and community. This study provided alternative perspectives and methods to consider what some of the current educational challenges might look like. Ultimately, the shortcomings of the educational system must be addressed, but, at present, what I have witnessed is an abundance of complaining and faultfinding and, perhaps even worse, indifference and silence that must be overcome. Whether stakeholders are being critical or silent, in my experience, the same effect ensues: there is little productive dialogue happening and, therefore, little hope for positive change to occur within the educational system. The purpose of this study

was to explore the use of a fable as an instrument of the humanities towards creating personal transformation of understanding and meaningful dialogue on educational issues.

Research Questions

I have written a story using nameless fictional characters (primarily horses) to bring educational issues to light and to magnify the root causes of some of the incongruities found in current educational policies, while attempting to minimize the attention to personalities and agencies that may have been involved in creating them. My research questions are:

1. To what extent do educational stakeholders perceive they were transformed by their experience reading and discussing a fable about educational issues?
2. What levels of dialogue are displayed as participants offer their observations, perceptions, and recommendations in response to reading and collectively interacting with a selected fable?

Understanding that a key element underlying the responses to the above research questions will be the extent to which participants relate to the fable, I will also answer the following questions: On what real-life policies is the fable based? And, how are these policies represented in the fable? The answer to these questions will be found in Chapter Four of the dissertation. Finally, in Chapter Six I will explore the extent to which participants felt that they could personally relate to the events presented in the fable. At the conclusion of Chapter Six, I crystalize the findings from my own deconstruction with the findings from the responses to generate implications and recommendations.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides an originally created artefact specifically designed for enhancing dialogue on educational issues. Other studies that used the humanities in education utilized only pre-existing poetry, music, art, and literature (McKie, 2012; Monday, 2012). No research was discovered that created a story (or any other artistic piece) specifically for the study as this project did. I believe an original work with a specific focus on educational issues complements the previous studies that have shown the effectiveness of using the humanities to educate. This fable, representative of the humanities, was used for this study and will also contribute to the existing pool of resources available for future instruction concerning educational policy.

This study is significant because it builds on previously set forth theories about the efficacy of the humanities in personal development and communal meaning-making (Rosenblatt, 1995; Galda, 1998; Flower, 2003; Dallmayr, 2004; Hoover, 2011). This dissertation is also beneficial as the fable created adds to the body of humanities literature available for use by instructors in educational policy. Further, it helps provide a means toward bringing policies and practices into closer alignment by giving stakeholders a common context in which to discuss educational issues. Finally, the findings from this study provide a foundation for future research to determine if personal changes and meaningful dialogue actually lead to better policies and improved student outcomes.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. This section will first provide a diagram that represents an overview of the project in a single illustration. Following the diagram, an expanded explanation of each of the chapters will be presented.

Figure 1 represents an overview of the flow and design of this research project. This dissertation begins with a statement of the problem (Chapter One). Chapter Two provides the literature review supporting the use of the humanities in education. Chapter Three provides the methodology and the grounding for the methods used. Chapter Four is the underlying supporting evidence for *The Foal and the Ranch* and provides a deconstruction of the fable. Chapter Five summarizes the research findings. Finally, the dissertation concludes with the answers to the research questions along with conclusions and implications emerging from the study (Chapter Six).

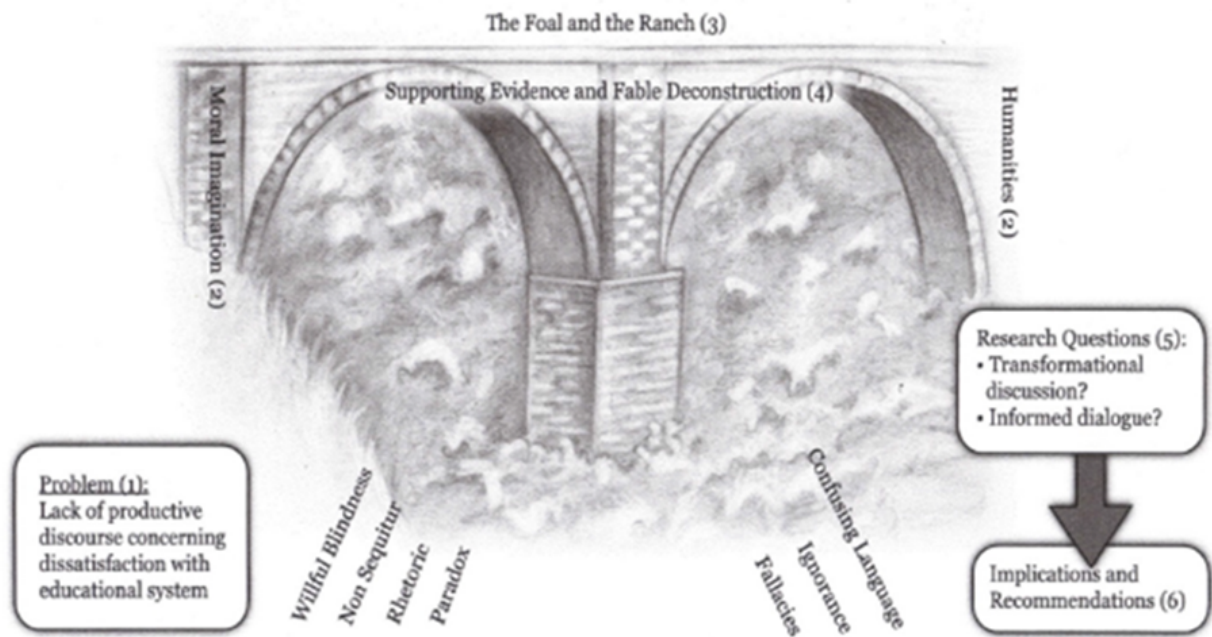


Figure 1. Exploring the Use of the Humanities: Towards Transformative Dialogue on Educational Issues

Chapter 1: The Purpose and Significance of this Study

Chapter One provided the background for this dissertation, the research questions I answered, as well as the significance of this study. The background was a double-story. I began by recounting the experiences of my family as we navigated our exceptionally gifted child through the educational system. Subsequently, I discussed my personal journey that inspired the creation of the fable, *The Foal and the Ranch*. Next, I provided an explanation of the problem and the research questions I answered. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief description of how the dissertation is organized.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methodological Instruments Introduction

Chapter Two begins with a review of the literature that explores the use of humanities in education, and validates the use of storytelling and fables as effective means to enhance dialogue on educational issues. I examine the usefulness of the humanities and various theories concerning the personal interactions between the reader and the text. I also establish my role as author/storyteller, identify my audience, and reveal how I use critical constructs of language, literary devices, and informal logic, to reveal current fallacies in education and provide a foundation for productive future dialogue. Furthermore, this chapter presents the rationale behind the creation of *The Foal and the Ranch* and provides the framework for the deconstruction of the fable (Chapter Four).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter Three outlines the methodology and methods I used in this dissertation. I begin by detailing my research parameters including definitions, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions for this study. Next, I provide the research procedure including the recruitment of participants, the reasoning for my research decisions, and the process participants went through as they engaged with the fable and discussed it with other readers. Chapter Three concludes with a description of my coding process as well as an explanation for how the data were analyzed.

Chapter 4: Deconstruction of *The Foal and the Ranch*

In Part I of Chapter Four, I offer empirical data, legal documents, and existing educational policy to show the real-life foundations for the incidents described in *The Foal and the Ranch*. This section includes an exploration of giftedness, the purpose of public education in Saskatchewan, justice in schools, PISA results, and policies pertaining to home-based education. In Part II, I use the concepts provided in the toolkit from Chapter Two of this dissertation to

deconstruct the fable. Whereas *The Foal and the Ranch* provided a representative example from the humanities – the beliefs, feelings, and human constructs of education, Chapter Four provides the background and rational evidence related to selected educational issues. The chapter also deconstructs the events and descriptions expressed through *The Foal and the Ranch*. In essence, the author of *The Foal and the Ranch* took real life experiences and described these in a fictional setting. This fourth chapter takes the fictional stories from the fable and gives them a footing in the real world.

Chapter 5: Exploration of Participant and Group Responses to Fable

The purpose of Chapter Five is to characterize the findings from exposure of each of the three fable-focused discussion groups. In addition, this chapter will explore each group's perceptions of how they were impacted by reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. The views of each group are examined as are the perceptions of each participant's personal transformation. At the conclusion of this chapter, each group will be described with respect to their cognitive and affective learning and group results will be compared.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings, Conclusions, and Implications

This final chapter crystalizes my own deconstruction of the fable (Chapter Four) with the findings from participant responses (Chapter Five). Merging the information from these two chapters will consider the usefulness of *The Foal and the Ranch* (as a representation of the humanities in the context of educational policy challenges) and answer the research questions. Additionally, I will explore the implications of this study for theory, policy, and practice; and explain how this dissertation helped fill the gap in existing research and provided a foundation for future research.

Summary of Chapter One

As I have navigated my children through the educational system, I found that many school practices did not seem to align with educational policy. As my journey progressed, I encountered few educators who were willing and able to discuss these educational issues in a realistic manner, and few parents who were even aware that certain policies existed. It occurred to me that educational policies, educational legislation, and educational outcomes are written in a fashion that few educational stakeholders read or understand. The problem I address in this dissertation is the apparent lack of meaningful dialogue among educational stakeholders regarding important educational issues. The purpose of this study was to explore the use of a

fable as an instrument of the humanities towards creating personal transformation of understanding and meaningful dialogue on educational issues. The following chapter explores relevant existing literature and presents the toolkit that I have created to inform readers and equip stakeholders as they discuss educational issues.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with a review of the literature that explores the use of humanities in education, and validates the use of storytelling and fables as effective means to enhance meaningful dialogue on educational issues. I examine the usefulness of the humanities and various viewpoints concerning the personal interactions between the reader and the text. I also establish my role as author/storyteller, identify my audience, and reveal how I used critical constructs of language, literary devices, and informal logic, to reveal current fallacies in education and provide a foundation for productive dialogue in the future. Furthermore, this chapter presents the rationale behind the creation of *The Foal and the Ranch* and provides the framework for the deconstruction of the fable (Chapter Four).

Conceptual Diagram of Chapter Two

The chapter begins with an explanation of the value and usefulness of the humanities in education. The following section reveals the gap in research concerning the humanities, as well as the perceived void of artefacts available to instructors who wish to incorporate the humanities into their instruction methods. Finally, the role of the author is shown as one who takes on the personas of the Jester and Cassandra to tell his story; and concludes with the provision of a toolkit for exploring the constructs of language, the use of literary devices, and informal logic.

Figure 2 illustrates how the information in Chapter Two is organized.

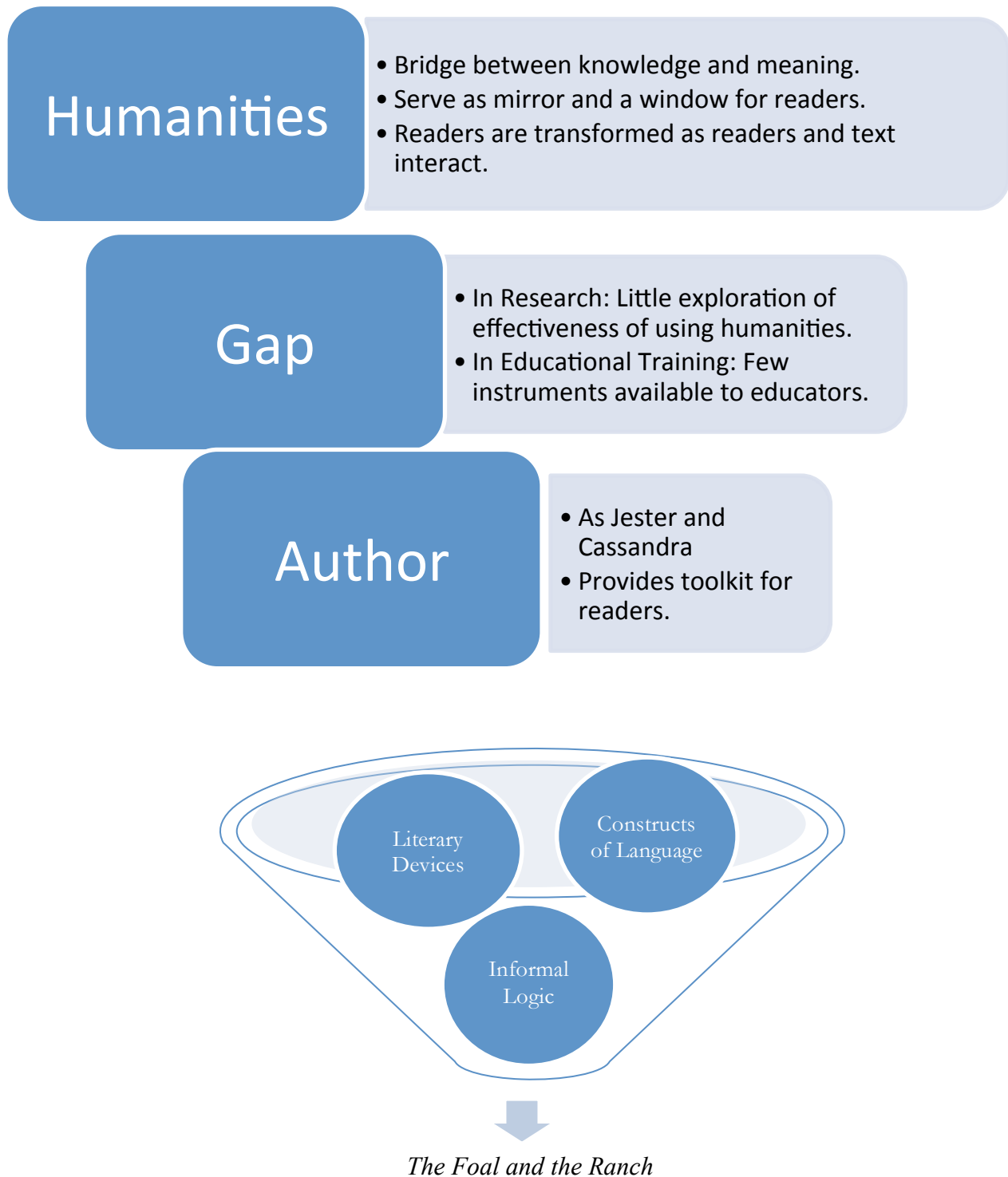


Figure 2. Conceptual diagram of the organization of Chapter Two

The Value and Usefulness of the Humanities

It is my contention that there is much relevant information readily available to educational stakeholders, but the format of this information is not conducive to widespread education or meaningful dialogue. Journal articles provide valuable insights into the philosophies of education. National and provincial reports deliver recent information as to the current status of education in the Country and the Province. Undoubtedly, in the modern technological era, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Education Act*, and school division policies, are just a few mouse clicks away from most people. The style and format of these sources of information, however, are not easily read or understood by most educational stakeholders. What journal articles, expert reports, and legal documents all have in common is that few people take the time to read these texts, and fewer still understand the implications of what they read. A less technical approach is needed to generate informed discussion about educational issues among all stakeholders. One method of bridging the gap between ignorance and understanding is the use of the humanities.

Overview of the Humanities

As Garland (2012) pointed out, the humanities can entertain while they help people to become open-minded critical thinkers. With specific reference to those who practice the humanities, Garland observed:

[They] ask central and pressing questions about the meaning of life, about its *telos* or *summum bonum*, about the best way to live, and the best way to foster human flourishing, and all this in turn requires us to ask what constitutes a well-ordered policy and what it means to be civic-minded. (p. 304)

If it is true that the humanities cause people to consider the meaning of life, to ponder the conditions that would enable human flourishing, and to contemplate effective policy, would not the field of education be a prime venue for the humanities? Although Garland acknowledged that some of the questions posed within the humanities may never be conclusively answered, the humanities serve to recognize human accomplishment, identify human frailty, and keep foundational issues in the forefront of the minds of policy makers. These are all worthwhile and necessary attributes to have in the field of education and educational policy.

Although many people have viewed the humanities as dealing with belief while the sciences pertained to knowledge, Chamberlin and Vale (2012) argued that people should not

have to choose between belief and knowledge and, in fact, cannot choose between the two (p. 163). Jacobs (2012) said that the humanities allow us to consider issues and values “in ways not facilitated by other kinds of knowledge and other skills” (p. 207). Science attempts to answer *how*, while the humanities try to answer *why* (Monday, 2012). Empirical studies are limited in use because they offer only partial explanations of our ever-changing world, and much of reality lies beyond the quantitative (English, 2005, 2008; Gallucci, 2012; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Jacobs, 2012; Samier, 2006; Samier, Bates, & Stanley, 2006). Moreover, according to Garland (2012), humanities not only display the classic clashes between good and evil or right and wrong but they also show that in moral dilemmas, it is often right fighting right. Through the use of the humanities, readers (or listeners) are encouraged to gain a new outlook: to see through the eyes of another. The intent of this new perspective is to educate stakeholders, increase empathy, encourage critical thinking, and promote justice and equity.

In his research to discover the usefulness of the humanities in education, McKie (2012) found that the humanities did not ensure that practitioners would automatically become fully skilled and ethically sensitive, but they did foster participants’ “sense of discernment, enhance[d] their own responsibility for learning, support[ed] ethical regard for others, provide[d] different perspectives on human experience and contribute[d] to a balanced curriculum” (p. 803). The use of the humanities does not guarantee critical thinking or good judgment in participants, but does increase the likelihood of both (English & Bolton, 2008; Jacobs, 2012; Monday, 2012; Samier & Lumby, 2010; Stedman, 2008; Warner, 2011). Because the humanities can increase the probability that stakeholders will engage in critical thinking and sound judgement, they are a needed supplement to the empirical, quantitative, and legal information that is available (Cro & Grogan, 2011; Gagliardi & Czarniawska, 2006; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Middlehurst, 2008; Pashiardis, 2009). Additionally, the humanities can serve to take the audience over obstacles that undermine and inhibit productive inclusive dialogue, while also providing a shared context and common perspective. Much like a bridge, the humanities provide a new vantage point for travellers as they are given safe passage over the impediments in their paths.

Humanities as a Bridge

Imagine your child is calling to you from the far bank of a raging river. In order to save her, you know you must somehow cross over this seemingly impassable barrier. You step near the edge of the shore, but it is unstable and too soft to get solid footing and you begin to sink.

You quickly jump back! As you look out over the river, you see unrelenting waves smashing against jagged rocks creating a thunderous roar that drowns out the pleading cries of your daughter. Panic begins to set in.

In desperation, you shout encouragement to her. The violent whitecaps and cresting breakers mock you as they send your reassuring calls echoing back into your ears. Through the waves and spray and mist, you can barely make out the shoreline on the other side and can scarcely discern the outline of your frantic child as she flails her arms begging you for help. You know you need to do something to save her, but traversing this uncontrollable tempest is impossible. How do you get to her? How do you save your daughter?

Suddenly, above the roar of the water, you hear someone call to you and you look downriver to find the source of the voice. As you adjust your gaze, you realize that you had been so fixated on the crashing waves in front of you that you had not noticed that just steps away was a bridge over the rushing water. From high atop the bridge, an unfamiliar person beckons you to come. You scramble up the bridge and join the stranger and, together, you cross securely over the bridge. Upon reaching the other side, you run to your daughter, and take her safely into your arms and reassure her that everything is going to be okay. This is how I see use of the humanities in the context of this dissertation: it will provide a bridge over the obstacles that have prevented us from helping our children.

When I first envisioned the design of this study, I saw the humanities (represented in this dissertation as a fable) as a bridge that would take educational stakeholders across the chasm of imprecise language, fallacies, rhetoric, and ignorance, that undermine profitable discussion; and takes them to a new and common paradigm where they are given a common context and tools for productive dialogue. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the literature abounds with references to the humanities as a bridge – a bridge to understanding not only of the relevant issues, but also an understanding of one's self.

The humanities function as a bridge is foremost a connection between policies and practices and the implications of such on the human experience (Ciulla, 2004; English, 2006; Monday, 2012; Samier & Lumby, 2010; Stedman, 2008; Warner, 2011). The humanities are a bridge by which we connect our sensual experiences with our thoughts and feelings about those perceptions as we endeavor to understand the world and our place in it (Achilles, 1981; Farquhar, 1968; Monday, 2012; Samier, 2006). This bridge leads readers to a greater

consciousness of our current milieu and allows us more in-depth insights into our own thoughts, feelings, motives, and character. As stakeholders individually cross the bridge of the humanities, they come to a greater understanding of themselves and each other, allowing them to reunite on the other side with a common understanding of the present and with a shared context through which to imagine the future. This less scientific, less empirical approach to knowledge is historically common and presently longed for. It is a type of understanding referred to by Aboriginal peoples as alternative ways of knowing.

Alternative Ways of Knowing

This project is about informing readers about the realities of public education and then inviting them to imagine and discuss together how things might be made better. In *Different Knowings and the Indigenous Humanities*, Coleman (2012) repeated the words of Arrow Keeper: “We only come here [to this life] to dream” (p. 149). And then, like me, Coleman proposed that one of the best ways to collaboratively imagine and to dream together is through the use of humanities, especially storytelling.

The humanities allow us to maintain what Aboriginal people call a “learning spirit” and provide us a medium through which we can communicate with each other about the goal of knowledge (Coleman, 2012, p. 146). Coleman stated that in Aboriginal tradition spiritual guides are put in our lives “to remind us about what our purpose is” and warns us of the ease of which we can lose our way, because “we get very much interested in everything else and we can go in all kinds of directions” (p. 147). As individuals comprise our social organizations and create institutions such as public schools, the same principle applies: we must all be reminded of our purpose, and the purposes of the organizations we create, are, lest we lose focus and begin acting in ways that are contrary to what we believe to be our purpose. The larger an organizational power becomes, the more important the focus on purpose must be (Des Rosiers, 2012). Using all manners of ways of knowing becomes imperative as ways of knowing shape individuals, individuals shape our organizations, and these organizations shape our society. Thus, the use of humanities plays a vital role in both personal development as well as the democratic process.

The Role of the Humanities in Maintaining Democracy and the Rule of Law

Organizational structures such as dictatorships, communism, fascism, and theocracies, do not require, or even tolerate, critical self-evaluation or program-evaluation by the common man. The citizenry in these regimes is expected to blindly follow and obey the commands of those in

power, but this is not true in a democracy. A democracy is based on the rule of law and requires an informed and knowledgeable electorate who are willing and able to judge their own behaviour, as well as the actions of governmental organizations (Des Rosiers, 2012). For the purpose of educating society, Koritz (2007) advocated a return to the humanities citing one of its greatest strengths as the ability to “ignore existing power structures and disciplinary boundaries” and to, instead, speak to the realities of the situation (p. 248). It is the humanities that will bridge the gap of ignorance and indifference and take ordinary citizens into the realms of political debate and democratic participation.

What is needed for most members of society to be able to be included in democracy and public debate is for issues to be discussed in a manner that is easily understood. Often, the most basic and functional method to effectively communicate the multiple levels of complex issues in a simplified manner is the humanities (Brieschke, 1990; Coleman, 2012; Des Rosier, 2012; Koritz, 2007; Monday, 2012; Warner, 2011). The humanities also bring awareness of the perspectives of other people and encourage empathy which yields a more productive and validating discussion (Brandon, 2002; Des Rosiers, 2012; Coleman, 2012). When stakeholders are engaged, educated, and confident they understand the issues at hand from both their own perspective, as well as the perspectives of other stakeholder, they are much more likely to participate in the democratic process, and to evaluate themselves and public institutions fairly, equitably, and intelligently.

If, on the other hand, a society allows itself to become complacent and ignore the plight of those suffering from injustices and inequality caused by unfair policies and practices, it is vulnerable to two perils. First, the society “robs itself of talents, of opportunities, and of moral courage” (Des Rosiers, 2012, p. 13). In other words, the people will individually and collectively fall short of their potential. Second, societies which continue to allow a difference between what the law (or other public policy) *says*, and what the law (or public institutions) *does*, negate the rule of law, and society thus “undermines the legitimacy of many of its institutions” (Des Rosiers, p. 13). If members of society are to justly, equitably, and peacefully co-exist, there must be empathy for the positions and perspectives of others. The humanities can help evoke this empathy as readers interact with literature.

Reader-Response Theory

The Reader-Response Theory as stated by Rosenblatt (1995) contends that a transaction occurs between literary texts and the reader in which both the reader and the text take an active role in interpretation (p. 295). Because all readers bring their own experiences to the text, there is no singular meaning to literary works. According to Rosenblatt, “There is no such thing as a generic reader or generic literary work... A novel or poem or play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols” (p. 24). As a reader interacts with written text, he or she vacillates on a continuum between what Rosenblatt referred to as *efferent* and *aesthetic* reading stances.

Efferent reading stance. An efferent reading stance is one in which the reader looks for what he or she might take away from the text. The reader attempts to ascertain what information is being provided, the solution to a problem, or the course of action he or she should take (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Aesthetic reading stance. When a reader assumes an aesthetic reading stance, he or she is more focussed on the feelings, moods, and experiences that are being evoked through interaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 1995). Aesthetic reading allows readers a “lived through experience” in a fictional setting that allows them to learn more about themselves and others (Galda, 1998, p.2). Discussions about these stories often trigger personal recollections of related experiences as readers make emotional connections with the text and each other (Beach, 1990).

Relationship between the efferent and aesthetic stances. As readers navigate through written works, they shift back and forth along the continuum between efferent and aesthetic reading. Textbooks and scientific journals generally keep readers closer to an efferent stance while novels and poems are more conducive to aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt (1995) argued that there is no literary work unless there has been an aesthetic reading.

Reader-response theory suggests that the impact of efferent reading is maximized when the reader has first infused his or her own emotional connection to the material through aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt (1990) said, “the reader must first of all adopt what I term an aesthetic stance – that is, focus attention on the private, as well as the public, aspects of meaning” (p. 104). Additionally, Rosenblatt (1995) believed that it is through aesthetic reading that the capacity for thinking rationally about emotionally charged issues can be expanded. Following Rosenblatt’s

theory, this dissertation seeks to explore the transformational effects of having readers assume an aesthetic stance before engaging in discussions on complex real-world situations.

Reading as Transformation

Like Rosenblatt, Galda (1998) believed that reading was a creative transactional activity in which the words on a page guided readers into creating their own personal meaning. Just as words are transformed into meaning by the reader, so aesthetic reading often transforms the readers themselves (Galda, 1998, p. 3). The use of humanities allows readers to more clearly see themselves and the world around them. Galda described this significance of this aspect of reading:

The potential power that is inherent in reading literature, a power that comes from both book and reader. This power enables readers to transform words on a page into emotional experiences that function as mirrors and windows into our lives and the lives of others. (p.1)

The combination of reading a particular work and then discussing what was read allows for individual reflection and transformation, as well as communal meaning-making. Galda (1998) said:

The meaning that readers create as they read, fueled by the reader's own culturally situated experiences, is at once individual and intensely social. The text itself, as language, provides an opportunity for individual meaning making while also promoting shared meaning. (p. 2)

By aesthetically engaging readers, literature often acts as a mirror to oneself and a window into the lives and perspectives of others. With this increased awareness, the potential for increased empathy and shared meaning-making is expanded.

Using Moral Imagination

In a pluralistic society, such as we increasingly have in Saskatchewan, moral dilemmas – two desirable goals that are mutually exclusive – are inevitable (Tivnan, 1996, p. 59, 231). This reality is similar to Garland's (2012) observation that moral dilemmas are not usually right versus wrong, but are often right fighting against right. Moral imagination allows participants to transfer moral dilemmas into the realm of thought and ideas where they can be discussed in an attempt to bring hope to all involved (Somerville, 2006). It is the process of sparking this cognitive transformation that calls upon the humanities.

The act of creative thinking required in moral imagination has been opposed by those who did not know how to think (Patten, 2004, p. 17) and by those who were too apathetic, lazy, or cynical, to expend the energy that is required to think (Somerville, 2006, p. 235). In his assessment of the works of Charles Dickens, Himmelfarb (2006) said that the proper use of moral imagination not only reflected societal mores; it helped create them (p. 37). In this way, it is my hope that the *The Foal and the Ranch* will reflect the current condition of the educational system, and result in meaningful dialogue that will increase the prospect of creating a better system in the future.

Not all literature unequivocally supports the use of moral imagination for overcoming moral dilemmas. For example, Tivnan (1996) said that moral imagination was useless because people persisted with their existing belief systems until scientific evidence emerged (combined with the majority of people accepting the evidence), or, until personal experience caused people to reconsider their positions (p. 235). Commenting from a less extreme position, Fesmire (2003) accepted the use of moral imagination with the caveat that all resulting discussions center on “ideals and ends” (p. 4). Fesmire’s statement corresponds with Sandel (2010) who wrote that “arguments about justice and rights are often arguments about the purpose” (p. 191). If moral imagination is to be utilized, the literature indicates that it should focus on principles, ends, and purposes. *The Foal and the Ranch*, therefore, focuses on the principles, ends, and purpose of education through the use of one of humanity’s earliest teaching tools - storytelling.

Communicating Meaning through Storytelling

As noted earlier, some people do not feel qualified, or would rather not expend the effort required, to employ their moral imagination. As discussed under the heading, *Alternative ways of knowing*, making information as accessible and simple for stakeholders, therefore, is of prime importance for enhancing meaningful dialogue. For the engagement of moral imagination, Himmelfarb (2006) and Fesmire (2003) encouraged the use of a novel. Macdonald (1993), Goldberg (2003), and Coleman (2012) advocated for the use of storytelling as a means to communicate. Somerville (2006) also endorsed the use of storytelling by saying that “stories allow us to buy into and share our communal imaginative experience” (p. 17). By separating ourselves from reality through the use of a fable, the content will weave fact with fiction (Collins, 2003, p. 159), logic with emotion (McAdams, 1993, p. 29), and the left brain with the right brain (Nisker, 1998, p. 108). It will also provide a story that will be remembered long after

analytical and empirical evidence have been forgotten (Macdonald, 1993). McAdams (1993) said that stories should be used often because storytelling is the primary function of the human brain (p. 28). Postman (1995) said that “the purpose of a narrative is to give meaning to the world, not to describe it scientifically” (p. 7). McAdams concurred with Postman when he wrote that stories are not judged by their ability to provide accurate accounts of events, but by its “believability and coherence” (p. 28). The result, therefore, is that for a story to be effective, it need not give a factual account of what has occurred, but it must mirror reality enough that the reader can relate to, and draw meaning from, the fictitious events. This relatability allows a fable to be written in simple plain language, yet still be effective in conveying meaning.

The Role of Parables and Fables

This study stemmed from the desire to *get around* or *get over* the confusing language, fallacies, rhetoric, and other obstacles that often undermine discussions in education. The fable designed for this dissertation was intended to transform readers and to create an open dialogue on educational issues. While the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, the most effective means to go from point A (problems/complaints) to point B (productive dialogue) may involve a more round-a-bout route – a parabolic trajectory – a bridge. A parabolic course enables stakeholders to circumvent obstacles and view educational policies from a new, shared perspective. An effective vehicle for taking readers over obstacles to a common perspective is a parable.

From the same root word as parabola, a parable is a fictitious story designed to teach a lesson through the use of a simplified analogy. As a parabolic-shaped bridge takes one gently over areas that are difficult to navigate, so a parable uses simple language and an easy to understand plot to take readers over distractions, and allows them to view and discuss complicated situations without being inhibited by the commotion and diversions below. A fable is simply a parable that utilizes animal characters with human traits (such as the ability to speak). One advantage a fable has over a human-character based parable is its propensity to further remove readers from real life human participants and specific real-life occurrences. The hope for the fable in this study was that it provides a story that parallels educational issues while mitigating the chances that participants become offended or defensive.

Who Benefits from the Humanities?

When answering the question, *for whom are the humanities useful?* Des Rosier (2012) answered, “Humanities are for three groups: the powerless, the powerful, and the indifferent” (p. 13). The powerless discover the source of their oppression and find words to articulate their current situation and hope for improvement (Coleman, 2012; Des Rosier, 2012). The humanities also serve as a means to reach out to the powerful in hopes that they will see the damage that their policies and practices may be inflicting and to rectify them. Meanwhile, those who are indifferent because they feel uninformed, intimidated, insignificant, or that the situation simply does not impact them, may gain confidence, competence, and the understanding of how they too are affected by injustices in society.

Humanities for training. Along with the powerless, powerful, and indifferent, the literature indicates that people studying policy analysis also benefit from increased attention to the humanities (Achilles, 1981; Monday, 2012; Payne, 1984; Stedman, 2008; Warner, 2011). The humanities help these students understand the uncertain and complex realities of human thought and action and “may be especially valuable in sensitizing students of policy analysis to the difficulties they will confront” (Payne, p. 92). Teaching this next generation of leaders lessons in critical thinking and empathy prior to them taking their positions in educational leadership is vital for the causes of justice and equity in education (Viljoen, 2008; Monday, 2012; English & Bolton, 2008). I have been delighted to already see the warm reception given to *The Foal and the Ranch* in education undergrad courses as well as graduate studies. This seems to validate the hypothesis that the humanities are a strong asset to education, as well as the distinct possibility that there is a void of material currently available for instructors to utilize. This leads to examining the role this study will play in the existing body of research and literature.

The Gap in Research

Many authors have identified a gap in the research investigating the usage of the humanities to educate, as well as a void in educational training as a result of a lack of the use of humanities in preparing leaders (Achilles, 1981; Bullough, 2006; Ciulla, 2006; Cowan, 2007; Dembowski, 2007; English, 2006, 2008; Furquhar, 1968; Lebaron & Baderacco, 2009; Murphy, Vriesenga, & Storey, 2007; Ribbins, 2006; Samier, 2006; Tillman, 2009). Historically, research and leadership preparation in education have focused primarily on a scientific positivist approach

(English, 2005; Gunter, 2005; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Monday, 2012). While positivism is not without merit, strictly quantitative methodologies tend to ignore or disregard qualitative data that lie outside of a positivist framework (Ryan, 2006; Monday, 2012). The data that may be ignored often include ethical issues, justice, contexts, or values, which affect the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders in education (English, 2005, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Samier, 2006; Samier, Bates, & Stanley, 2006). Previous authors have called for an increased use of the humanities in educational training and research because it supplements positivist theories, substantiates quantitative inquiry, and, as a result, adds a depth of understanding to educational issues that pure positivism usually cannot achieve (Achilles, 1981; Bullough, 2006; Ciulla, 2006; Cowan, 2007; Dembowski, 2007; English, 2006, 2008; Furquhar, 1968; Lebaron & Baderacco, 2009; Murphy, Vriesenga, & Storey, 2007; Ribbins, 2006; Samier, 2006; Samier, Bates, & Stanley, 2006; Samier & Lumby, 2010; Tillman, 2009). Adding humanities to existing empirical studies will help create a more holistic picture of educational issues and contribute to the improvement of educational policies and practices.

As a result of the above shortcomings in existing research and practice, there has been a call to add humanities to educational leadership training and research (Barone, 2003, 2007; Finley, 2003; Monday, 2012; Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006; Woo, 2008). It is also believed that the humanities should play a greater role in the pre-service education of both teachers and administrators (Achilles, 2005; English & Bolton, 2008; Samier, 2006; Monday, 2012). The literature also indicated that in spite of this widespread call for the use of short stories and novels, these methods of instruction have been rarely incorporated into educational training programs (Gehrs, 1994; Jacobs, 2009; Monday, 2012; Samier & Lumby, 2010; Warner, 2011). It is my intention to have *The Foal and the Ranch* begin to address this discrepancy, show the utility of the medium, and, perhaps, inspire future authors to develop similar materials in their own field of expertise.

Monday (2012) wrote that further research is required to investigate the efficacy of incorporating more of the humanities in educational leadership programs. It was Monday's belief that the main obstacle to a more broad use of the humanities is the rarity of educators who are willing and able to successfully employ this instructional method into their programs. Corresponding to Monday's belief, it would appear that a related impediment is the lack of quality materials in the humanities that are relevant, readily accessible, easily understood, and

pertinent to the real issues future educational leaders will experience. The need for increased utilization of the humanities has led previous researchers to call for further research to be done “to discover if humanities use in educational programs has efficacy in the preparation of educational leaders . . . [and answer,] would individuals trained in this manner indicate that such preparation has value?” (Monday, 2012, p. 200). While increasing the use of the humanities has been widely believed to improve understanding of educational issues, further research in educational settings must be conducted to verify the utility of having the humanities help inform policy.

The literature indicates that in spite of a call for the implementation of the humanities in educational leadership training and policy discussion, there has been little progress made toward this end. This discrepancy seems to be a result of a focus on positivist research, a lack of willing and/or able instructors in the humanities, and a dearth of relevant humanities material available to stakeholders. By creating a fable specifically designed to speak to significant educational issues, and then researching the effectiveness of this technique for enhancing meaningful dialogue among educational stakeholders, I believe this study not only helps narrow the gap in educational research, it also provides a tool to help educators fulfill their mandate of training educational leaders. The humanities offer a medium for an exchange of ideas, which is difficult to attain solely within more scientific frameworks.

The Role of the Author

In Chapter One I recounted the story of my family and how I became personally interested in having candid discussions concerning educational issues. My role has now changed from that of one wanting to participate in such meaningful dialogue, to that of one trying to educate stakeholders and to facilitate and inspire others to join in the conversations as well. Toward the end of engaging stakeholders in productive dialogue, I describe the toolkit I used in the creation of *The Foal and the Ranch* and make it available to readers as they embark on a critical exploration of educational policy. Before getting too far along in the journey of educational reform, however, it is important to have an understanding of the current realities of the educational system. For this task, I find two characters with whom I identify: The jester archetype and the mythological Cassandra.

The Jester

For the purpose of exposing the current state of the educational system and promoting discussion on educational issues, I used the archetype of the jester. Heffernan (2011) defined the role of the jester as one who “draw[s] attention to things that are going wrong, to stir things up” (p. 225). According to Nisker (1998), the role of the jester is to vocalise the hypocrisies of the state and to expose political realities. This gives people an opportunity to deal with reality as it truly is – not as they wish it was (Patten, 2004, p. 10). Nisker said, “The jester takes the wind out of politician’s sails, deflates inflated rhetoric, punctures hypocrisy and . . . [exposes] bureaucracy until they are shown to be nothing but hot air” (p. 21). To make meaningful discussion possible, the jester allows stakeholders to witness and acknowledge a common understanding of reality.

The use of language is paramount for those discussing educational issues, and it is the same for the jester who wishes to initiate such discussions. Nisker (1998) said that a successful jester “can deconstruct a language and speak in strange tongues that we all understand” (p. 25). This chapter examines the complexities and the critical constructs of language while the *strange tongues* that will be employed by the jester in telling the story of *The Foal and the Ranch* will be the utilization of language so simple that most thirteen year olds will be able to understand what is being said. Just because the language used by the jester is simple, however, the topics discussed may cause controversy and discomfort. Provoking controversy and discomfort are desirable if change is to occur. This assertion leads me to present and discuss the role of another character.

Cassandra

As described in Greek mythology, Cassandra was given the gift of prophesy but was subsequently cursed with the fate that no one would heed her words (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). The spirit of Cassandra is present when a person with an eye for detail vocalizes his or her concerns that hypocrisy, incongruence, misalignment, or errors exist; and that change is necessary (Heffernan, 2011). According to Heffernan, “Cassandra . . . embodies that baffled rage that we all feel when no one else can see what we see” (p. 201). A jester may get away with some of his irreverence and blasphemies because of his innocence and use of humour (Nisker, 1998), but the person who chooses to be a Cassandra will likely not escape unscathed. Although Cassandras are often harshly criticized, they are generally optimists who desire change and are

generally among the most loyal in an organization. They love their organization too much to ignore its shortcomings, and would rather discuss ideas than defend them or hide from them (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2003, p. 198; Heffernan, 2011, p. 203, 222). Both the jester and Cassandra create discomfort as stakeholders are forced to confront, or blatantly ignore, the truths that have been clearly exposed. This creates the question, *to whom are the characters in the fable speaking?*

Who is Responsible for Addressing Educational Issues?

The author of *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Robert Fulghum (1991), told the story of two road construction workers who, after a gruelling morning of work, sat down on the tailgate of a truck to eat their lunches. Upon opening his lunch box, one man viewed its contents and bitterly complained, “Every day! Every day it’s the same damn thing!”

“Who packs your lunch?” The other worker asked.

The first man sighed, “I do.” (p. 4)

As it is a social creation, the responsibility for public education lies with all citizens, especially with those to whom society has delegated the responsibility of oversight.

Unfortunately, as Postman (1995) pointed out:

Of all those who have business to conduct with schools – school administrators, classroom teachers, students, parents, politicians, publishers, and professors of education – it is the last who seem the least interested in talking about reasons [for school ineffectiveness], with the first not far behind. (p. 91)

Informed discussion will likely require the input of each group Postman mentioned, but those with the most influence to initiate dialogue are likely the two groups he identified as those least likely to do so: professors of education and school administrators.

Refusing to discuss problems does not make problems go away. On the contrary, it ensures that the problems will remain, increase in size and complexity, and that new problems will be created (Heffernan, 2011; Cloke & Goldsmith, 2003; Patten, 2004; Somerville, 2006). Remaining silent ensures the continuance of the status quo because as Heffernan (2011) observed, “Silence is the language of inertia” (p. 93). Those who see problems in education – especially those with the most power to rectify the problems – must vocalize their concerns and work toward solutions.

Remaining silent when one sees a problem brings to mind a quote generally attributed to Sir Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” (brainyquote.com, n.d.). If one considers the word *evil* to be too strong in this context, consider the discovery of Dr. Frank Luntz (2009): In a 2008 study of the 50 largest cities in the United States, the dropout rate was just slightly below 50% (p. 208). If the fact that nearly half of the students are dropping out of school is not evil, then it would be difficult to argue that school is necessary, or even good. It is imperative that stakeholders in education end the silence and begin an open honest discussion about the direction of public schools.

How to Initiate Discussion

As will be shown, until language is critically examined, literary devices are understood, and tools of informal logic are utilized, fruitful discussion is unlikely to occur. Much like Plato’s cave analogy, Nisker (1998) said that it is very difficult to describe the precise nature of a box when one is situated inside of the box (p. 8). The goal, therefore, is to take stakeholders in education out of the educational box and provide them with a common perspective from which they can impartially and equally view the educational system.

Once stakeholders are removed from their unique positions and limited perceptions, they may realize that there is an opportunity to discuss what they see from their new – and common – vantage point. It is possible that after examining and reflecting on education from their shared position, there may be a consensus that the purpose of education is free of paradox and fallacies, and the system in which the purpose is to be accomplished is also sufficient. I would consider this endorsement of the current state of the educational system a success for this project so long as meaningful discourse was created. Garland (2012) stated that even if the discussions brought on by the humanities do not yield conclusive answers, there is still tremendous value in the process. Discussion that reveals the need for change is good, but change for the sake of change is unnecessary.

Based on my own experiences and the literature documenting complaints about education, however, I did not enter this study expecting the educational system to receive a vote of confidence from participants. Instead of support for the current system, I believed that after reading the fable provided, and examining the educational system, readers would concur with Rumi (as cited in Nisker, 1998) who said, “When you eventually see through the veils to how things really are, you will keep saying again and again, ‘This is certainly not like we thought it

was!’” (p. 14). Regardless of if this study showed support or lack of support for the current educational system, the research was designed to explore if the humanities could be used towards personal transformation of understanding and if a fable could inspire meaningful dialogue on educational issues. In order to begin to lift the veils and initiate discussion on educational policy, I will explore the complexities of language, the negative aspects of literary devices, and provide tools of informal logic.

Toolkit of Language, Literary Devices, and Informal Logic

In spite of the fact that public education has overwhelmingly been identified as the most important institution for our future wellbeing (Luntz, 2009), many people believe that our schools are failing (Flores, 2012; Garland, 2012; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012; Kiyosaki, 2013; Robinson, 2013). Much of the alleged trouble originates with the complex nature of certain words, the confusing use of literary devices, and violations of informal logic that lead to sub-optimal student outcomes. This section will identify many of these common obstacles so they can be recognized in educational policies. The information provided reveals the tools used by the author in the creation of the fable, presents the framework for the deconstruction of the fable found in Chapter Four, and furnishes readers with a similar toolkit for discussing and creating educational policy in the future.

A Critical Examination of Language

An examination of language is foundational in this study because language is the only tool we have to frame educational systems and the discussions surrounding educational policy. While examining dictionary definitions of words may sometimes seem pedantic, it is imperative that discussions about educational policy originate from a shared conception of all the terms being used. Two parties debating any aspect of public education, for example, would have little substance until the precise definitions of *public* and *education* were determined. This is why Pritchard and James (2009) of the Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association wrote that the first action following the declaration of a debate resolution must be the defining of associated terms (p. 10). The importance of defining each term was further emphasized by Gula (2006) when he argued that “the misinterpretation of a single word can lead to confusion” (p. 102). For these reasons, I will carefully examine several words that are integral in discussing educational policy. I am not asserting that that the words I examine are the only words relative to the topic, I

am exposing how different uses of a word can cause confusion, and modelling the process that will be necessary for productive future dialogue.

Construction of what it means to educate. An example of how language has sometimes contributed to the confusion in education can be found in the definition of the word *educate*. According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, educate comes from the root word, *educere*, which means "to bring out (as something latent)." Award winning teacher and vocal critic of public schools, John Taylor Gatto (2005) agreed with this definition as he stated that education makes one a unique individual, not a conformist – anything else is merely schooling. What Gatto described as schooling, was similar to the second definition of educate: "to teach (someone) especially in a school; to give (someone) information about something; to train (someone) to do something; to persuade or condition to feel, believe, or act in a desired way" (merriam-webster.com). Based on these definitions, *educere* (the origin of educate) indicates that knowledge is latent within a person, and the process of drawing out this innate knowing would be considered education. The definition of *educate*, however, implies that knowledge is external and one is educated when a teacher imparts knowledge to the learner. Beyond the difference of *drawing out* or *placing in*, the relevant question becomes, *does education occur when information is taught or when information is learned?* To try to answer this question, the definition of teach must be examined.

Construction of what it means to teach. The two definitions of *teach* do little to alleviate confusion. The first definition indicates that teaching occurs when learning takes place: "to cause or help (someone) to learn about a subject by giving lessons (merriam-webster.com, n.d.). The second definition of *teach* focuses only on the teacher and requires nothing on the part of the potential learners except their presence: "to give lessons about (a particular subject) to a person or group." Contrary to this definition, Sir Ken Robinson (2013) stated that unless learning has taken place, no teaching has occurred. Making an even stronger statement, Monty Roberts (2000) claimed that teaching does not even exist, there is only learning. From these statements, it is understandable why there has been a movement towards merit pay for teachers (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006, p. 23): if, in the course of a school year, a child only progresses half a year, then, according to Robinson and Roberts, the other half of the year the adult in the room was not teaching, he or she was simply providing childcare and should be treated – and remunerated – accordingly.

Whether one believes in merit pay for teachers or not, because teaching appears to be at least partially, if not completely, predicated on the active participation of a second party (the learner), the occupation of teaching differentiates itself from other professional groups such as doctors or lawyers whose accountability rests solely on their own actions (Fenstermacher, 1991, p. 138, Bull, 1999, p. 160). This issue leads to another linguistic dilemma.

Examining the problematic nature of teacher accountability. The definition of *accountability* found in Miriam-Webster's online dictionary (n.d.) is "the quality or state of being accountable; especially: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions." This definition specifies that one can only be accountable for one's *own* actions. By definition, therefore, a teacher may be held accountable for such things as his or her content knowledge, classroom management methods, instructional strategies, and personal conduct, both in and outside of the classroom; but cannot be held accountable for the actions of another person. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2012b) indicated that those involved in public education, however, would be held accountable for "improving student achievement" (n.p.). A teacher *cannot* be held accountable for the actions, achievements, or lack of achievements, of his or her students; yet student outcomes are the very measure the Ministry has stated it will use to keep teachers accountable (assuming a medical doctor prescribes the correct medication, is he or she held accountable if the patient does not *take* the medication?). Accountability is not the only linguistic obstacle in education policy, the use of the word potential has also created a nebulous standard for educators, students, and parents.

A closer look at the construction of potential. Adding to the confusion caused in educational systems is the use of words that sound impressive but have little or no concrete use. Gula (2006) referred to this tactic as fustianism: "(gobbledygook, jargonese) is 'bombastic, pretentious, fancy, inflated language and ideas [that] can sometimes camouflage the fact that the speaker has nothing of consequence to say, . . . that he is just throwing words around, and that his words mean nothing'" (p. 107). In education, fustianisms often manifest in the setting of goals or standards that cannot be measured. A common word found in educational jargon is *potential*.

In Saskatchewan, for example, the goal of education is for all children to reach their full potential (Saskatchewan Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction Review, 1999; School^{Plus}, Ministry of Education, 2004, 2011, 2012; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2006; Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, n.d.; Saskatoon Public Schools, n.d.; Sun West

School Division, 2012). Even if one were to disregard the absurdity of setting such a lofty goal when schools obviously operate under severe financial constraints, defining the purpose of education in terms of potential is problematic for several other reasons. In his book, *Of Human Potential*, Israel Scheffler (1985) asserted that educators often use the word potential to absolve themselves of responsibility. Scheffler based his argument on three main points: First, potential is not fixed. Second, potentials are often competing and mutually exclusive, therefore, judgements must be made as to which competing potential is of more worth. Third, value judgments must be made on which potentials are morally praiseworthy (and worthy of pursuit), and which potentials are not. Because neither the Ministry of Education nor any Saskatchewan schools have an instrument for measuring potential (L. Burridge, Superintendent of Programs and Instruction: Student Achievement & Supports Branch: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, personal communication, April 26, 2013), nor have they addressed Scheffler's three arguments, it would appear that the use of the word potential is fustian and has caused much ambiguity and confusion.

Insights from critically examining language. Regardless of the motive, "Ambiguity of statement can result from imprecise language, from words that are vague or abstract or relative" (Gula, 2006, p. 88). The further from the practical application of policies, the easier it is to ignore, overlook, or justify ambiguous language and to ignore its consequences (Dörner, 1996; Heffernan, 2011). The closer one gets to the classroom, or to having one's job performance judged on one or more of these ambiguous words, however, the more confusing, disturbing, and real, they become (Heffernan, 2011). Inconsistent and impractical policies are common reasons that teachers, who are relatively powerless to initiate policy change, often feel trapped and utter statements such as, *I love teaching, but I hate the bureaucracy*.

Viewing language on a more broad scale, Postman and Weingartner (1969) wrote in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* that, for better or worse, "We are imprisoned...in a house of language" (p. 101). Additionally, Hock (1999) stated that instead of being used to clarify, simplify, and illuminate, meaning; language was more often used "to confound or conceal it" (p. 234). One of the benefits for policy-makers who conceal meaning through language is found in cases when, if the meaning were to be exposed and examined, it would be revealed that certain policies or practices were founded on the use of confounding literary devices and not on sound pedagogy.

Perplexing Literary Devices

The next phase in understanding the root causes of confusion and inconsistencies in educational policies is to investigate the presence of literary devices in the educational system. Examples of paradoxes, goal inversion, and rhetoric will be provided for instructional purposes and they will be revisited in Chapter Four as the fable is deconstructed.

Paradoxes in public education. One need not look hard to find paradox in schools – public education itself is built on two paradoxical premises. Bull (1990) and Postman (1995) stated that, traditionally, the main reasons for having public school are to train children to conform to societal norms while simultaneously encouraging free and critical thinking in young minds. Kalyanpur (2011) stated that a paradox also occurs in “everything for everyone” inclusive educational systems if there are financial constraints and competing priorities (p. 1068). In fact, competing priorities are a natural bi-product of limited resources. School officials who do not have unlimited access to resources, yet promise to meet the individual needs of each student, are creating a paradox.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2011), for example, has mandated a policy of inclusion in public school classrooms. This means that whenever possible, every student should be served in his or her neighbourhood school in the same classroom as his or her age-similar peers. With the goal of having every child reach his or her full potential, this inclusive policy often creates a paradox. If we assume that a student with intensive needs due to a learning disability is best able to meet his or her potential in a regular classroom setting, the Ministry may be meeting its obligation to this student. If, however, the presence of the special needs student detracts in any way from any other student achieving his or her potential in that classroom, a paradox arises – the needs of two equally worthy students are mutually exclusive – meeting the needs of one of them violates the needs of the other.

In spite of negative connotations associated with the concept of paradox, the literature indicates that paradox in organizations should be expected, welcomed, critically examined, and, sometimes, allowed to exist (Hock, 1999, Cloke & Goldsmith, 2003). Somerville (2006) wrote that humans have a paradoxical need for both a sense of belonging, as well as adventure (p. 241). In education, Somerville’s paradox is similar to that of students who need to feel competent in their abilities while, at the same time, feel challenged by the material they are being asked to learn. Cloke and Goldsmith (2003) invited discussions such as this when they wrote,

“Ambiguity, paradox, and enigma do not reflect a lack of clarity about the problem, they express its deepest hidden, ubiquitous, dualistic truth” (p. 181). The conclusion that can be drawn from the literature is that paradoxes may or may not be able to be eliminated, but regardless, policy making is enhanced by exposing and critically examining existing paradoxes.

The use of doublespeak and goal inversion to conceal paradox. The literature refers to a tendency of policy makers who are confronted with a paradox to produce what Dörner (1996) euphemistically called “conceptual integrations” or, “doublespeak” (p. 68). According to Dörner, the reason policy makers commit doublespeak is because they do not want to abandon either of their goals. He argued that while this tactic may verbally seem reasonable, any positive results that may occur are short-lived.

Corresponding to doublespeak, policy makers will utilize *goal inversion* which “makes unintended bad results into good ones” (Dörner, 1996, p. 70). An example of doublespeak with goal inversion would be referring to PISA results for Saskatchewan and celebrating that the achievement gap between high and low achievers had decreased. While reducing the achievement gap is a goal of the OECD, of which Canada is a member, this celebration does not take into account that Saskatchewan scores, overall, have decreased. The reason the gap had narrowed was because the scores of lower achievers have decreased less than the scores of high achievers (Statistics Canada, 2001,2010). The goal inversion also does not acknowledge that the goal of education in Saskatchewan is for all students to reach their full potential – a standard that PISA tests do not even measure, but dropping scores would likely not be a good indication. Doublespeak and goal inversion are strategies employed by those who do not understand paradoxes, those who are unwilling to confront and attempt to resolve paradoxes, or those who have succumb to some form of rhetoric.

Rhetoric pertaining to educational issues. For the purposes of this study, rhetoric has been addressed as a literary device. Because of its complicated definition, however, it could have also been identified as a language issue. The first definition of *rhetoric* found in *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* (n.d.) is “language that is intended to influence people and that may not be honest or reasonable.” By this definition, I argue in this dissertation that educational policies alluding to all children reaching their potential are rhetoric because the statements are unreasonable. In this sense of the word, rhetoric would include the fallacies of idealism and wishful thinking as will be discussed below under the heading *Commonly Used Fallacies*.

Merriam-Webster's (n.d.) second definition of *rhetoric*, however, is “the art or skill of speaking or writing formally and effectively especially as a way to persuade or influence people.” By this second definition, readers may argue that the views presented in this dissertation are also rhetoric. In fact, the second definition indicates that if people are influenced by anything that was artfully or skillfully presented, rhetoric is involved. Because *rhetoric* generally has a negative connotation, sentiments and policies are usually considered rhetoric only if they state something that is not honest or not reasonable. Listeners who realize they have fallen victim to the persuasiveness of rhetoric usually discover that they were swayed by logic that was not sound. Aiding people in recognizing and overcoming violations of informal logic is the purpose of following section.

Identifying and Overcoming Violations of Informal Logic

In attempting to defend or explain paradoxical policies or rhetoric in education, a policy-maker may use a line of reasoning that is not logically sound. As will be shown, once these fallacious arguments or non sequiturs are understood, they can be more easily recognized.

Describing and recognizing fallacy. The definition of fallacy in the literature has two slightly different meanings. According to literarydevices.net (n.d.), fallacy is an error in argument. *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, however, defines *fallacy* as “a wrong belief: a false or mistaken idea; a deceptive appearance.” Gula (2006) argued that “strictly speaking, [a fallacy] is not an error in fact or belief. It involves *thought process*; therefore, it pertains to conclusions, not to the statements that form those conclusions” (p. 43). Patten (2004) asserted that fallacy was an “error in reasoning *or* defect in argument” [emphasis added] (p. 129). For the purpose of this study, because a flaw in an argument *or* a flaw in a conclusion would contribute to an inaccurate view of reality, they will both be considered fallacy.

The first fallacy that I address pertains to the deceptive appearance of a fallacy in language. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of public education in Saskatchewan is to have *all* children reach their full potential. Gula (2006) stated, “A very dangerous type of fallacy occurs when people confuse *all* with *some*... The all/some fallacy is insidious, yet it is remarkably common. It leads to stereotyping, to bigotry and prejudice, and to terribly wrong conclusions” (pp. 117-118). Patten (2004) indicated that the weakness of absolute language such as *all* is that it only takes proof of one exception and the entire statement is proven false (p. 47). Patten further indicated that any policies that use the word *all* should be assumed false, and should

never be acted upon (p. 48). Speaking to the motives of those who make absolute claims, Patten said, “Statements [using *all*] are not likely intended to intentionally deceive, so they are not lies – they are just wrong; [and] statements from politicians, especially when accompanied by a blanket assurance, are likely to be wrong, dead wrong” (pp. 48-49). The problematic nature of the use of the word *all* could have also been included in the language section, but since it will become the crux of one of the main points of this study, it was included as a fallacy rather than simply vague or ambiguous language.

Commonly used fallacious arguments. Discussed below are common fallacious arguments that will surface throughout this study. It is worthwhile to note that some of the fallacies are more likely to be present in educational policies, while others will more likely be seen in the fable created by the researcher.

A common fallacious argument used when a member of the general public is questioning the policies or practices of a professional group is the *appeal to ignorance*. The appeal to ignorance materializes when one individual uses another individual’s lack of information on a specific subject as proof that their own particular argument is right. An example in education would be a principal who responds to a concerned parent by asking the parent questions such as: *Do you have your degree in Education? Are you familiar with Bloom’s taxonomy? Do you know what John Dewey said?* Because most parents would have to answer “no” to these types of questions, they feel ignorant and unable to converse on the matter. The concern will often be dropped, unresolved, and the appeal to ignorance maintains the status quo.

In situations such as public schooling in which the majority of the population acts – and may seem to believe – a certain way, a common fallacious argument is the *appeal to popular opinion*. This appeal assumes that because a thought or action is generally accepted, it is correct. For example, it may be argued (fallaciously) that because most parents send their children to public school, it must be the best way to educate young minds. In this example, the fallacy is even deeper rooted as governmental education is legally compulsory, therefore, the fact that most parents educate their children according to governmental standards (usually in public schools), says more about the extent in which citizens are law-abiding than it does about their belief in schools. History is replete with examples which prove that widely held beliefs – even by professionals in a specific field – are not necessarily correct (several examples are: sun orbits the

earth, leaches clean blood, infections are not prevented by washing). Just because the majority of people act or believe a certain way, does not mean that the action or belief is beyond reproach.

When the beliefs of the general population, and especially those of professionals, are called into question, however, many will get defensive. Rather than address the accusation or question directly, defensive people may personally attack the person voicing the concern. This fallacious argument is known as *Argumentum ad Hominem* (argument against the man). In this situation, the person who feels threatened may substitute a logical response with a personal insult. An example of fallaciously attacking the person rather than responding to a concern may occur when a principal receives an email from a father who is concerned that teachers are not adequately addressing perceived bullying against the parent's child. When confronted with the concern, a teacher may respond by dismissing the concern because the father *cannot even hold down a job and he declared bankruptcy last year*, or maybe smear his name by asking, *wasn't the father accused of spousal abuse a few years back, who is he to be concerned about school bullying?* These are obviously irrelevant facts to the issue at hand, but arguments against the person are still common and often go unnoticed.

Rather than responding to a claim or accusation, a person questioned may use the *onus probandi* (burden of proof) argument. This strategy puts the burden of proof on the accuser to prove his or her own allegations before the accused will respond. For example, a mother may assert that her son's teacher did not enable her son to reach his full potential. Rather than address possible shortcomings in his teaching, the teacher may ask the mother to prove that her son did not reach his full potential – obviously something that is very difficult to demonstrate. This fallacious argument can be additionally problematic as our justice system is based on a premise of innocent until proven guilty. Also challenging for reformers is the ease by which policy-makers can hide behind the burden of proof argument when nebulous terms such as potential are used as standards.

In contrast to *onus probandi*, where the accused refuses to respond, *argumentum verbosium* (proof by verbosity or proof by intimidation) occurs when the accused responds with an argument that is so replete with intimate details and complex vernacular that a person cannot understand and/or address what was said. The practice of complicating a matter to the point that most people cannot feel like they comprehend the issues was one of the main purposes for creating a fable about educational issues. Rather than asking parents to read and understand the

content and implications of such documents as the 1100 page *NCLB Act*, parents and educators now have access to a short fable written in simple language to provide a context through which to dialogue.

Another fallacious argument that can often go undetected is the *false dichotomy*. This technique frames the argument in such a way as to suggest that there are only two conceivable alternatives. The false dichotomy may be used by some supporters of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* by asserting that anyone who does not support *NCLB must* believe that some children deserve to be left behind. If claims such as this go unchallenged, they can easily become assumptions that label both supporters (as being pro-equality), as well as those that oppose a given policy or practice (as being anti-equality or elitist), when neither label may be accurate.

Just as complicated speech and excessive detail may distract a listener, a speaker may use a red herring to avoid addressing an issue. The red herring fallacious argument is intended to redirect an audience to an unrelated issue that the speaker feels is easier to address than the issue at hand. For example, a policy-maker may steer a difficult discussion toward recent, but unrelated, improvements made to policies, practices, or facilities. The speaker may also raise certain hot-button issues or other politically correct and emotionally charged terminology in an effort to distract or side-track an audience. Often, after these discussions have concluded, the other party will realize that nothing was accomplished in the dialogue and the meeting was spent going down ‘rabbit trails.’ A simple educational fable may help discourage distractions and red herrings and encourages discussions focussed on the reality of educational policies and practices.

Similar to a red herring, a speaker may introduce a thought-terminating cliché. These clichés are used to pacify the audience, conceal the fact that little thought has been exercised, and to expeditiously move on to another topic. An example of a thought terminating cliché that may be heard by a mother when she expresses a concern that her child’s needs are not being met are responses such as *we believe all children can learn*, or *we encourage our teachers to provide differentiated instruction*. Clichés such as these may be true, but tend to end conversations without addressing the concerns of the mother or the needs of the child.

Another argument that can distract a listener from important issues is the broken window fallacy. The fallacious broken window argument focuses attention on benefits of a particular policy or action, but disregards lost opportunity costs. Educational administrators may use the

broken window fallacy when defending the use of inclusive classrooms. Administrators may argue that heterogeneous groupings help children with learning disabilities, or that inclusive classrooms help normal children learn to empathize with children with learning disabilities; but there is no mention of what academic learning these normal (or the academically gifted) children had to forego in order to help the children with learning disabilities, or the sacrifice these children made in order to learn empathy. It may be determined that the costs associated with policies such as inclusive classrooms are worthwhile considering the benefits, but failing to acknowledge these costs creates a fallacy.

Perhaps one of the most difficult fallacious arguments facing those who want to bring change to an established organization is the *argumentum ad antiquitatem*: the appeal to tradition. The appeal to tradition is a conclusion supported simply on the basis that it has long been held to be true. Additionally, Gula (2006) defined the appeal to tradition as “the unquestioning appeal to, or scorn of, tradition and precedent. [It] is a type of oversimplification and invariably reflects glib, shoddy thinking” (p. 156). As Gula indicated, the appeal to tradition can manifest on either side of an argument. First, it can be an attitude expressed in a statement rebuffing change because *we have always done it this way*, or, *I have always used that textbook*. Second, the appeal to tradition argument can be, as Patten (2004) stated, equally flawed if one uses scorn of tradition as the sole reason for discrediting a particular practice (p. 191). An example of this reverse side of an appeal to tradition would be if a father believes that a particular textbook should be replaced for the simple reason that it was the same textbook the father used when he was in school. Refusing to change because of tradition, or demanding change simply for the sake of breaking tradition, are equally fallacious, and neither provide a valid means to address the issue at hand.

Fallacies pertaining to the purpose of education in Saskatchewan. There are three fallacious arguments that one may encounter in pursuing educational reform in a jurisdiction such as Saskatchewan which puts forward that the purpose of education is to have all children reach their full potential. These are: the fallacies of determination, idealism, and wishful thinking. While distinct arguments, these fallacies are usually interconnected and often overlap. The fallacy of determination suggests that anything is possible. As Gula (2006) suggested, “If something that you would like to happen hasn’t happened yet, the reason that it hasn’t happened is that you haven’t wanted it to happen strongly enough” (p. 136). The fallacy of determination

is closely linked to the *all/some* fallacy. Absolute words such as *anything* create false hopes: telling a child she can be or do *anything* she wants. Can she breathe under water? Can she grow to 10 feet tall? As will be discussed below under the spotlight fallacy, isolated incidents can be used in perpetuating the fallacy of determinism. For example, a news story may be broadcast telling the story of an undersized athlete making a professional sports team. During his interview, the athlete says, *my mom always told me I could do anything I wanted – and here I am!* From this comment, some may infer that a person can accomplish anything to which they set their mind. This is a fallacy of determinism, however, because the interviewer does not go to the local factory and find small people who tried just as hard as this athlete, and were told similar things by their mothers, but never made it to the pros. Like *all*, disproving *anything* only takes one exception to make the whole statement false.

Similar to determination, the fallacy of idealism according to Gula (2006) “is used by those whose experience is limited and often by those whose lives have been sheltered. It is well-intentioned but hopelessly impractical” (p. 137). Within the educational system, it is idealistic to say that schools (with limited budgets) will enable all students to reach their full potential, or that teachers (often with 30 students in a class and four or five classes per day) will provide individualized differentiated instruction for each child. Well-meaning words that have no basis in reality are not only fallacious, they create false expectations and confusion for those involved.

The third fallacy is a type of emotional idealism known as wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is a specific type of appeal to emotion where a decision is made according to what might be pleasing to imagine, rather than according to evidence or reason. Wishful thinking includes statements that do not consider the fact that resources are limited (Black & English, 1986, p. 12; Hall, 2012, p. 44). The arguments of determination, idealism, and wishful thinking, are all fallacious, confusing, and detrimental, because they are not grounded in reality.

Fallacious arguments of which I may be guilty. The contentions listed above are some examples of fallacies of which policy-makers in the past may have been guilty. In arguing against existing policies, however, everyone, including myself, must be aware of the potential for committing these or other fallacious arguments in his or her own work. Some of the fallacies of which I, and my readers, must be mindful, are discussed below.

Some of the data examined in relation to this study reveal that over the past two decades two things have happened in Saskatchewan schools: there has been an increase in the use of

heterogeneous inclusive classrooms (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011), and, simultaneously, test scores have dropped (Statistics Canada, 2010). Without additional information, a person could wrongly conclude that inclusive classrooms *caused* test scores to drop. Stating causation when only correlation is shown is committing the fallacy of *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* – correlation proves causation. Similarly, this incorrect conclusion may also involve fallacy of the single cause.

The next fallacy of which one should be aware is the etymological fallacy. The etymological fallacy reasons that the original or historical meaning of a word or phrase must be equivalent to its present-day meaning. As discussed above, for example, education originally meant *to draw out*, now it means *to put in*. Is the original meaning irrelevant and the difference is simply a legitimate evolutionary change? Additionally, when writers from previous centuries used the word *school*, were they referring to the institution we think of when school is mentioned? To avoid committing etymological fallacy, considerations such as original context must be made when examining historical references.

Other potential pitfalls are the use of the straw man or the false analogy. The straw man is an argument based on the misrepresentation of an opponent's position. Somewhat similarly, the false analogy is an argument by analogy for which the analogy is poorly suited. Because the fable I use is an analogy of my perception of the public school system as described through the experiences of horses at Ranches, the false analogy may be the fallacy I am most at risk of committing. To guard against the false analogy in my own work, at the outset of Chapter Six I will return to this fallacy and explore whether or not participants felt that *The Foal and the Ranch* was a relevant portrayal of the educational system.

Four more fallacious arguments. There are four additional fallacies that should be identified as relevant to any party involved in a debate concerning educational policy: the spotlight fallacy, cherry picking, the appeal to emotion, and the Nirvana fallacy.

The spotlight fallacy occurs when a person uncritically assumes that all members or cases of a certain class or type are like those that receive the most attention in the media. The spotlight fallacy can be seen in statements such as *Steve Jobs dropped out of university and he was a billionaire, so university is not important*, or, *Einstein was labeled unteachable by his math teacher, so everyone who struggles in math is a potential genius*. The life experiences of a select few high profile individuals does not, by itself, prove or disprove an argument.

Another strategy often used in conjunction with the spotlight fallacy is cherry picking. In the case of cherry picking, the speaker provides evidence that supports his or her argument while suppressing contradictory evidence. A person would be guilty of cherry picking if, in trying to prove that a university education was a waste of time and money, talked about the financial successes of college dropouts like Steve Jobs (Apple) or Bill Gates (Microsoft), but failed to mention examples of successful university graduates such as Sam Walton (Walmart) and Warren Buffet (Berkshire Hathaway).

People providing individual examples, personal testimonies, or fables, may also commit the fallacy of appealing to emotion. By using anger, fear, pity, spite, or sympathy; a speaker (or writer) may cause an audience to ignore valid reasoning and be swayed by emotion. Emotional appeals may cause decision makers to forego solutions that will improve the situation because the changes may not be beneficial for all stakeholders or will inflict temporary pain or discomfort.

Failing to make changes that will improve an organization because the remedy may not be flawless is known as the Nirvana fallacy: the perfect solution fallacy. The Nirvana fallacy occurs when solutions to a problem are rejected because they are not perfect. As with most actions, there may be unintended and/or unknown consequences which may cause people to remain inactive from the belief that *the devil you know is better than the devil you don't*. Another example of the Nirvana fallacy may be seen in logistical issues where people may agree that students would be better served by restructuring schools, but then the question is raised, *what are we going to do about bussing? This plan would require one more bus*. Refusing to pursue a new course of action until the perfect solution is found is committing the Nirvana fallacy.

Before fallacious arguments can be rectified, one must be able to recognize them when they occur. One tool for exposing fallacies is the syllogism, which will be discussed below. First, I have included a brief description of one additional type of flawed logic that is prevalent in the educational system: the non sequitur.

Non sequiturs in educational policies. The fallacy of the non sequitur may occur in educational policy without readily being noticed. *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary* (n.d.) defined a *non sequitur* as “a statement that is not connected in a logical or clear way to anything said before it.” Gula (2006) added that the non sequitur is literally translated as “it does not

follow” (p. 55) and went on to say, “a non sequitur is a statement that claims to make a cause-and-effect relationship when, in fact, there is no logical connection between the premises and the conclusion” (p. 55). An example of a non sequitur in educational policy would be the following two statements: *The goal of education is for all students to reach their potential. We will measure student success through the use of norm-referenced standardized tests.* Because norm-referenced standardized tests have little relation to individual potential, the second statement is a non sequitur.

Overcoming flawed logic. Often caused by, and sometimes resulting in, fallacious arguments, flawed logic is evidenced when an argument or belief is unsound. Because a flaw in logic may occur in an assumption, or premise, leading to a particular conclusion, or in the conclusion itself, flawed logic may sometimes be difficult to identify and can easily lead to fallacious beliefs. To help identify and correct flawed logic, one tool proposed by Aristotle was the syllogism.

Using syllogisms to identify flawed logic. In order to expose a fallacy in an argument and determine the precise location of a flaw in logic, a syllogism is often utilized. The word syllogism literally means “reasoning together,” and they are usually comprised of two premises and a conclusion (Patten, 2004, p. 76). Patten’s example was:

1. All mammals are warm blooded. (major premise)
2. Whales are mammals. (minor premise)
3. Therefore, whales are warm blooded. (conclusion) (p. 77)

Gula (2006) endorsed the use of syllogisms in trying to discover truth. According to Gula:

The syllogism . . . forces us to spell out exactly what we mean. It leaves nothing to inferences. It demands that we be absolutely precise and clear. It forces us to distinguish between evidence and conclusions . . . it allows us to distinguish between statements of fact and statements of opinion . . . [and] forces us to determine whether we are dealing with matters of truth or with matters of reasoning. . . .If we disagree with a conclusion . . . [we must] determine if we disagree with the conclusion because we disagree with one (or more) of the premises upon which that conclusion is based or because there has been some flaw in the way those premises have been used. . . . The syllogism strips away

unnecessary verbiage . . . that can camouflage fallacies, and it exposes the fallacy logically and objectively. (p. 200)

In short, a syllogism forces people to deal with reality – whether they like it, agree with it, or not. Syllogisms will cause educational stakeholders to either confront fallacies and errors in logic, or it will compel them to willfully, deliberately, and blatantly, deny the truth.

An example of using a syllogism with one of the issues that will be presented in the fable would be:

1. All students reach their potential.
2. Ann is a student.
3. Ann reached her potential.

According to Gula (2006) this syllogism would be *valid* because the conclusion can be drawn from the premise, but it would be *true* only if the conclusion was true. If Ann reached her potential, the conclusion is true, and the syllogism is *sound*. If the conclusion is wrong and Ann did not reach her potential, then one (or more) of the premises is untrue or has been misused. If we assume that Ann was, in fact, a student, we are left to examine the first premise.

Conversely, the syllogism may be:

1. All students reach their potential.
2. Ann is a student.
3. Ann did not reach her potential.

In this case, the syllogism is *invalid* – one could not logically reach this conclusion based on the two premises. The conclusion, however, may be true or false. Again, assuming the second premise is true, the first premise is false and/or the conclusion is untrue. If it were to be shown that the conclusion was true – Ann did not reach her potential – logic would dictate that there was a flaw in the first premise. A syllogism is considered *sound* if it is *valid* (the conclusion can be logically drawn from the premises), and it is *true* (every premise and the conclusion are factual).

Syllogisms are not directly used or referenced in *The Foal and the Ranch* but are discussed in this section so that readers are provided with a tool with which they can critically examine existing policies as well as arguments within the fable. Although I do not claim syllogisms to be a cure-all for correcting flawed logic, when logical tools such as syllogisms are used in examining public education, it becomes clear that certain policies are unsound because

they are either invalid or untrue. In an effort to avoid succumbing to the above mentioned or other fallacies, it is prudent to determine why these fallacies originally occurred.

Why do fallacies exist in educational policy? If it is agreed that within public education policy and practices there exists confusing or conflicting language, paradoxes, fallacies, unsound logic, non sequiturs, and/or rhetoric; the question becomes, *why do these things happen?* In answering this question, I recognize that stakeholders represent a vast spectrum of perspectives, involvement, and agendas; but I assume that all participants in the educational system are seeking the betterment of some, if not all, of the educational process. This is an assumption that some critics of the educational system may contest, but investigating those who may have an agenda of intentionally undermining the education system is beyond the scope of this dissertation. This assumption, however, does not preclude the possibility that, in addition to succumbing to the various language issues and fallacies already discussed, there are some who consciously chose not to act because they are often afraid of negative repercussions (Patten, 2004, p. 17); they are “inattentive, stupid, or unreceptive” (p. 18); or, they are “lazy, sheep-like followers, who are reluctant to change” (p. 19). For many of the reasons stated above, Heffernan (2011) argued that a person may choose to remain ignorant of a problem. For others, however, there may be a sub-conscious reason for inaction and/or ignorance and the person may not even be aware of the fact they are blind to phenomena that are obvious to others.

Conscious ignorance: Willful blindness. Willful blindness, as described by Heffernan (2011), is avoiding potentially useful information because one is more comfortable not knowing (p. 246). In the educational arena, Manley-Casimir and Moffat (2012) and Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) argued that administrators “do not relish being forced to look at how blind they are or to hear how deaf they have become, and would prefer to rely on conventional wisdom – even if conventional wisdom is wrong, as it often is” (Nisker, 1998, p. 7). Heffernan’s research suggested that many people would rather be wrong than alone (p. 127), and the more people who witness an event, the less likely anyone would be to report it (p. 148). Due to the size of the education system and the familiarity most people have with it, the *appeal to popular opinion* and *appeal to tradition* fallacies often work hand-in-hand with willful blindness.

The two most common reasons for willful blindness are the fear of conflict and the fear of change (Hock, 1999, p. 97). Heffernan (2011) stated, “The hard thing . . . isn’t just that people don’t want to know. They don’t want to change. . . . Nobody likes change because the

status quo feels safer, it is familiar, we're used to it" (p. 91). Heffernan indicated that people see what they want to see, and he implied that this was usually a deliberate, conscious choice. The literature indicates that there may also be a sub-conscious reason that people do not see things that others may think are obvious.

Sub-conscious ignorance: The reticular activating system. According to Medical-dictionary.com (n.d.), the reticular activating system (known as the RAS) is defined as:

The system of cells of the reticular formation of the medulla oblongata that receive collaterals from the ascending sensory pathways and project to higher centers; they control the overall degree of central nervous system activity, including wakefulness, attentiveness, and sleep.

The aspect of the RAS that pertains to this discussion is role that the RAS plays in controlling attentiveness. If a person's conscious mind was forced to be aware of every stimulus in his or her environment, the countless quantity of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings would render him or her unable to function. In order to prevent this overload of sensory information rushing into the conscious mind, the brain automatically filters out information that it deems undeserving of conscious attention. A simple example of the RAS at work is the experience many have had where a person learns a new word (or the name of a famous person) that he or she believes he or she had never encountered before. In the weeks that follow, the person hears the same word or name several more times in unrelated contexts. It is usually not the case that the word just came into use, it is the fact that the conscious mind reprogrammed its information filter, and the RAS now allowed that word through to conscious thought. Because the RAS controls what is allowed to enter the conscious mind and what is not, it can make one blind to evidence that is contrary to one's beliefs, or that one has previously deemed unimportant (reticularactivatingsystem.org, 2013, January 5; Heffernan, 2011, p. 45). The RAS provides a physiological explanation for the common view that one sees what one is looking for (Heffernan, 2011, p. 90; Nisker, 1998, p. 148; Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 95). Either subconsciously or through conscious effort, one programs the RAS to see – or to not see – specific happenings in one's environment.

Whether people are blind to certain factors in their environment willfully, or they are blind as a result of sub-conscious activity, the results of the blindness are the same. Heffernan (2011) emphasized that blindness will cause people to feel efficient and safe, when, in reality,

they are allowing the problem to which they are blind to become more dangerous, and the amount of harm it will cause grows as we become increasingly “crippled, vulnerable, and powerless” (p. 4). It is logical to presume that once a person’s eyes are opened to the realities of their environment, the effects of the blindness will be reversed, and stakeholders will become increasingly enabled, strong, and powerful.

Summary of Chapter 2

In spite of the fact that the humanities have long been used to communicate meaning and to bridge the gap between policies and their implications on the human experience, they have been underutilized in the field of education. Existing literature indicates that there has been a void of research on the usefulness of the humanities to inform policy discussions, as well as a lack of literary tools available to teachers who desire to incorporate the humanities into their instructional strategies. In this chapter I outlined my role as the author and provided a toolkit to aid stakeholders as they engage in meaningful dialogue on current educational issues. With a more clear understanding of how we construct language, use literary devices, and utilize instruments of informal logic, I believe more productive discussions can occur. Now that paradoxes, fallacies, rhetoric, non sequiturs, and flawed logic have been defined and exemplified, readers are better equipped to engage in meaningful dialogue on educational issues.

An improved educational system is the ultimate end I am pursuing. This end cannot be attained until productive dialogue among stakeholders transpires. This project was a means to that end as it involves research to explore the use of the humanities toward personal transformation and to explore dialogue that occurs following participants’ exposure to *The Foal and the Ranch*. The following chapter delineates the methodology I employed for this dissertation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This Chapter outlines the methodology and methods I used in this dissertation as approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan (Appendix A). I begin by detailing my research parameters including definitions, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions for this study. Next, I provide the research procedure, including the recruitment of participants; the reasoning for my research decisions; and the process participants went through as they engaged with the fable and discussed it with other readers. The chapter concludes with a description of my coding process and an explanation for how the data were analyzed.

Research Parameters

The following section outlines the research parameters I employed for this study. The parameters include defining key terms, setting delimitations, recognizing limitations, and acknowledging assumptions.

Definitions Used in this Study

Because the diverse meanings people ascribe to words are at the heart of many of the communication breakdowns in education, I define the words used in the design of the study in their most simplified definitions: usually as rendered in a basic dictionary. There are some words, however, for which meanings are more complicated and will require stakeholders to agree on definitions at the outset of dialogue on educational issues. Because these more problematic words do not affect the design or procedure of this study, they were addressed in Chapter Two under the heading *A Critical Examination of Language*. The following definitions will apply for this study:

Dialogue: An exchange of ideas with the goal of reaching a satisfactory settlement. The levels of dialogue in this study will be assessed according to an adaptation of Bloom's taxonomy of learning in the affective domain as represented by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The categories of measuring dialogue from the lowest to the highest levels are: Receiving, Responding, Valuing, Organization, and Characterization (see Appendix B). For the purpose of this study, dialogue will be considered *meaningful* if participants operate in the first three levels of affective learning (Receiving, Responding, and Valuing); whereas the highest two levels (Organization and Characterization) will constitute *productive* dialogue. The underlying distinguishing characteristics are that

meaningful dialogue occurs when participants listen, share, and seek to understand the perspectives of other participants; whereas productive dialogue involves participants working together to generate solutions or create an action plan. A further explanation of how dialogue will be used and defined is found below under the heading, Group Dialogue.

Discourse: The sharing of thoughts through vocal expression. The quality of discourse will be measured according to a rubric adapted from Bloom's revised taxonomy of learning in the cognitive domain (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). From lowest to highest, discourse will fall under the following categories: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating (see Appendix C).

Fable: "A short story that usually is about animals and that is intended to teach a lesson" (merriam-webster.com, n.d.). As such, I follow Blackham (2014) who stated in *The Fable as Literature* that "A fable is a story invented to tell the truth, not a true story...the actions are natural and the agents imaginary" (p. ix).

Humanities: "The branches of learning (as philosophy, arts, or languages) that investigate human constructs and concerns as opposed to natural processes and social relations" (merriam-webster.com, n.d.). The humanities create the habit of imagining new realities, which is inseparable from the habit of acquiring new knowledge (Chamberlin & Vale, 2012, p. 167).

Parable: "A short story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson" (merriam-webster.com, n.d.). Of special note is the similar origin of the word parable with *parabola*. A parabolic course takes one around a focal point to a position on the other side just as a parable teaches through an implied, rather than a direct, lesson.

Potential: "Existing in possibility: Capable of development into actuality" (merriam-webster.com, n.d.). Scheffler (1985) argued that discussions about potential must acknowledge that potential is not fixed, potentials are often competing (and mutually exclusive), and that value judgements are inherently necessary when considering potential (i.e. do we want a person's potential for *bad* realized? What is *bad*?). The problematic nature of defining potential will be addressed further in Chapter Four.

Purpose: "The reason why something is done or used" (merriam-webster.com, n.d.). Munroe (1992) said that purpose is the original intent that explains *why* something was created.

Munroe warned that “Until purpose is discovered, existence has no meaning, for purpose is the source of fulfillment” (p. 1).

Stakeholder: Postman (1995) defined educational stakeholders as “school administrators, classroom teachers, students, parents, politicians, publishers, and professors of education” (p. 91). With the exceptions of politicians and publishers, this study included representation from all of the groups Postman listed.

Group Dialogue

Group dialogue, it has been posited, is a foundational human condition through which ethics emerge and thoughts take form (Pace, 2005). In order for an organization to continue to learn and improve, stakeholders in the organization must engage in meaningful dialogue. By exposing and reconsidering their own assumptions, stakeholders use dialogue to rise above their own thought patterns and explore the perspectives of others (Deakins, 2007). According to Deakins, meaningful dialogue creates team learning that leads to a common, shared vision for the organization. While arguing in favour of the research merit of group dialogue, however, Atkinson (2013) pointed out that the defining of *group* and *dialogue* are important considerations that will impact data analysis.

A group can be defined based on similarities in identity, social values, and/or power (Otten & Geppert, 2009). For this study, a differentiation must be made between *inter*-group and *intra*-group discussions. Some have argued that for authentic dialogue to occur, inter-group discussion among individuals representing different groups must transpire (Otten & Geppert). If groups are not heterogeneous, what results may be potentially valuable, but should not be construed as dialogue, but instead as *voice* (Atkinson, 2013). Atkinson, however, contended that because a group may be defined based on a multitude of characteristics, a clear demarcation between dialogue and voice need not be made. Rather than attempt to differentiate between dialogue and voice, researchers should be mindful of how they have chosen to compile their groups and allow for the possibility that different groupings may yield different conclusions. Because I have used the relatively homogeneous groupings suggested by Finch and Lewis (2012), group discussions were intra-group discussions, and the prospect of future inter-group discussions was addressed for future research.

Similar to the problematic nature of defining certain words relating to the educational system, many authors likewise regarded the word *dialogue* as challenging (Abu-Nimer, 1996;

Bennet, 2005; Nagda, 2006; Rodenborg & Huynh, 2006; Wiesand, et al., 2008; Gastil, Black, Dees & Leichter, 2008). Besides the above mentioned belief that dialogue requires representation from different groups, some researchers proposed that heterogeneity among group members is not necessary because the value of dialogue is in the creation of meaning as ideas are passed between participants (Flower, 2003; Dallmayr, 2004; Hoover, 2011). This approach to dialogue is reminiscent of Rosenblatt's (1995) and Galda's (1998) theories that meaning is created through the process of interacting with literature. Because of their parallel constructivist views: that meaning emerges from literature through interaction with the reader, and that meaning is created from dialogue through shared ideas; I have chosen to align my research with the approach of these researchers and authors who believe that meaning is created through the process of interacting with literature through reading and through interaction with people through dialogue.

Delimitations of the Study

Due to the application of specific legislation and policies, the focus of this dissertation directly pertained to education in Saskatchewan. Issues and principles revealed from the fable are likely applicable to other jurisdictions, but much of the emphasis of this study is that legislation and purposes differ by region and, in order to be fair and equitable, policies must be in line the overarching purpose of each organization – in this case, the purpose of Saskatchewan schools. I have therefore delimited the creation and deconstruction of the fable to the contents of the *Saskatchewan Education Act* and overarching guidelines affecting education in Saskatchewan.

Because of budgetary and time constraints, restricting research to one geographical location was the most efficient means of conducting research without considerably affecting research findings. As I am located in Saskatoon, I delimited my study to participants in Saskatoon and surrounding area.

The data were collected in March and April of 2014. Participants in the study were delimited to adults who were involved in policy making at the divisional, local school, and post-secondary levels, and those familiar with, and/or impacted by, existing policy (teachers, administrators, parents, teacher candidates). Discussion groups were delimited to three to five participants per group. More information on the recruitment and engagement of participants is provided under the heading *Research Plan*.

Minors under the age of 18 were not included in this study. The intent of participant selection was to choose adult participants who have been involved in the creation or implementation of educational policies, those who will be involved in the near future (teacher candidates), or those whose children may have been affected by educational policies and practices (parents).

Limitations of the Study

The researcher could only help facilitate discussion and reflections, but could not control the honesty and openness of participants. Some participants may have felt pressure to defend or misrepresent their opinions because of personal or professional relationships (friendships, STF membership and/or political associations).

Because of the relatively small size of Saskatchewan, participants may not have felt comfortable critiquing policies or practices that they, or someone they know, had a part in creating. Additionally, the STF professional code of conduct prohibits teachers from criticizing other teachers (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2006). I believe the potential limitation of not wanting to (or being forbidden to) negatively discuss peers was mitigated by the fact that participants were discussing a fictional story, not real-life people or events.

Prior to conducting my research, I was aware that participants may choose not to participate in discussions or to offer only limited contributions. By choosing participants intimately involved in education, however, I did not foresee lack of engagement as a meaningful potential limitation, but it was possible, nonetheless. In the end, I did not sense that any participant was holding back.

Finally, my own experiences may have influenced my research. Because my family and I have been personally affected by the inconsistencies in policy and practice, it has stirred my passion in this area, and may have created a bias. Acknowledgement of my own perspective is part of the reason that this study focuses the effectiveness of promoting meaningful dialogue among a variety of stakeholders rather than attempting to guide the resulting discussion toward any predetermined outcome.

Assumptions for this Study

For the purpose of this study, I made the following assumptions:

1. Nearly everyone in Saskatchewan has had some experience with the educational system, and those experiences represent a vast spectrum of perspectives and beliefs.

2. There is significant room for improvement in public education.
3. Educational stakeholders have the best interests of some, if not all, children at heart.
4. The current context has been inadequate for discussing educational issues in a realistic and inclusive manner.
5. The extant canon of literature regarding the state of education is insufficient to inspire productive dialogue among educational stakeholders.
6. Personal enlightenment and meaningful dialogue will precede positive change.
7. People construct the world through many sources, including personal experiences, experiences of others, empirical evidence, humanities, and more.
8. One's own educational experiences create a perspective on education that may not be shared by others.
9. Public schools, and the Saskatchewan educational system as a whole, have economic constraints which impact education in the Province.
10. Provincial guidelines and policies have created similar situations in classrooms across Saskatchewan. If the frustration felt by teachers, students, or parents is systemic, a fable that describes these situations should be applicable and relatable to a substantial percentage of readers in the Province.

Researcher's worldview. The underlying philosophical assumptions in this study encompass a combination of worldviews. My ontological stance stems from a constructivist perspective that asserts that "when participants provide their understandings, they speak from meaning shaped by social interaction with others and from their own personal histories" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 40). It was my belief that the meaning participants attached to the educational system, and how they felt that the fable represented the system, would arise from personal experiences and discussions with others. This belief proved accurate as the research progressed. Participants drew from their own experiences as they shared stories of how their perspectives on the educational system were formed, and how the fable was relevant to their viewpoints. This constructivist ontological stance meshed with my epistemological position of a participatory worldview.

Participatory worldviews are politically generated and are usually associated with qualitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 41). Corresponding to this study, qualitative research with a participatory worldview often deal with "issues such as

empowerment, marginalization, hegemony, patriarchy, and other issues affecting marginalized groups” and that “the participatory researcher plans for the social world to be changed for the better, so that individuals will feel less marginalized” (Creswell & Plano Clark, p. 41). As such, I approached the research in this dissertation from a belief that individual members of society create their own meanings based on their experiences and interaction with others, and political reality is created through negotiation among participants.

The choice to explore the use of the humanities to evoke change and promote meaningful dialogue resulted from my personal observation of the limitations of the American Psychological Association (APA) style of writing. As was discussed by Madigan, Johnson & Linton (1995), I also recognized the propensity of APA style language to appear to convey “objective information about a fixed eternal reality” (p. 433) and strived to break from this positivist tendency by employing multiple writing styles. This leads to a pragmatic approach to research as I attempt to discover “what works” (Creswell & Plano Clark, p. 41).

Because my research attempted to explore the usefulness of a fable for engaging educational stakeholders in the democratic process, Mertens (2003) suggested that a name for this type of investigation is the “transformative-emancipatory perspective” (p. 159). The transformative-emancipatory perspective sprung from a belief that increasing diversity was creating social injustices (Mertens, p. 135). Mertens asserted that it is the role of the researcher to expose and explore these injustices in hopes of providing a voice to the disadvantaged and to help free them from their oppression. The research I conducted in this dissertation was designed to begin the process of emancipation for those disadvantaged by the educational system by providing an artefact of the humanities and exploring the extent to which readers believed they were changed. I also sought to discover if the fable evoked meaningful dialogue on educational issues. Perceived personal transformation and meaningful dialogue among stakeholders do not guarantee freedom for those being oppressed, but they are necessary precursors in the process of emancipation. Considering these philosophical positions, I will present the procedure employed for this research.

Research Procedure

This dissertation involved the following steps for recruitment and engagement of participants, as well as the procedure for data analysis.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were chosen from stakeholders in the educational field and were contacted in person or by email using the Recruitment Script (Appendix D). Participants included teachers, administrators, parents, and graduate students in educational fields, who were known by me either professionally or personally. Also included were undergraduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. The undergrad students were teacher candidates in the College of Education who were taking a class in which *The Foal and the Ranch* was required reading. I was not the instructor nor did I have any input in the grade received by any of the students. I did, however, lead a one-hour class discussion about the fable and, at the end of class, invited students to volunteer to take part in a discussion group for this dissertation. Three of the 25 students indicated they would participate. Aside from the one-hour class discussion, I had no prior relationship with any of the three student participants.

In order to allow participants adequate opportunity to voice their opinions and comments, while balancing the need for a multiple of perspectives, discussion groups were comprised of three to five participants (see further explanation below). There were three discussion groups with a total of 11 discussion group participants. I intentionally included participants with somewhat extensive experience in the educational field as well as those just beginning a career in education. The purpose for using College of Education undergrad students was to explore the thoughts and perspectives of those who have an interest in education but whose beliefs and perspectives may not be as well established as those who have been involved with education for longer periods of time. Parents were included to gain the perspective of those who are impacted by the educational system but are not professionally involved in the delivery of education. Prior to participating in this research, all participants signed the Participant Consent Form (Appendix E).

Reason for Using Focus Groups

Because focus groups have often been used to raise the consciousness of people and to promote social justice, it was a logical choice for this study. As was set out in Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, "The goal for the educator or facilitator within [focus groups] is to engage with people in their lived realities, producing and transforming them" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, p. 890). Focus groups "decenter the role of the researcher" (p. 904) and allow people "to connect with each other collectively, share their own

experiences, and reclaim their humanity in a nurturing context” (p. 893). This type of interaction naturally lends itself to the collection of “rich information (i.e., high quality data) that will eventually result in accounts that are replete with thick description” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, p. 898). Because the goal of this research study is to explore the perceptions of individual transformation and to observe the dialogue between participants, focus groups were chosen as the most effective method of engagement and data collection.

How the Composition and Size of Discussion Groups was Chosen

In this study, I have followed the recommendations of Finch and Lewis (2012) in *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. Finch and Lewis stated that the generally accepted rule of focus groups is to make them largely homogeneous with elements of diversity (p. 190). Homogeneity allows participants to feel more comfortable and safe, and they are, therefore, more likely to engage in more honest and in-depth discussions. The secure feeling felt by participants is additionally important in situations when discussions pertaining to sensitive or emotional issues such as education. Diversity within the larger homogeneity is important to allow for multiple perspectives on the issues and to “tease out differences in views” (Finch & Lewis, p. 190). The authors suggested constructing the group from a common parameter but including diversity such as “age, social class, and relationship status” (p. 190).

Following the above guidelines, I invited participants from three distinct groups to join the three discussion groups. Group “A” was made up of teacher candidates; group “B” was comprised of teachers, former teachers, and educational administrators; while group “C” was made up of parents who currently have children in the educational system (characteristics of groups overlapped as there were members of group “A” and group “B” who were also parents of children in the educational system). As mentioned above, the teacher candidates were unknown to me prior to this research study and responded to an open invitation to their class. The teachers and administrators were known to me as we were members of the same Ph.D. cohort in Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. Of the 12 members of the cohort, I invited six to participate who I knew were currently involved in education at some level. Of the six invited, five chose to participate. Beyond taking three classes together one year prior, I had a minimal relationship or contact with any of them. The parents in group “C” were chosen from personal acquaintances of mine who had school-aged children and who I suspected

may be willing to take the time to read and consider *The Foal and the Ranch*, and then to meet to discuss their feelings about the fable. Because participants from group “B” and group “C” were known to me prior to this study, as a favour to me, they may have been more willing to participate than the average stakeholder may have been. That said, there was no noticeable difference of engagement or enthusiasm between those groups and group “A” in which none of the participants knew me.

Although the larger category of participants was similar within each group, there was diversity between individual participants. For example, group “A” was drawn from an undergrad class of elementary school teacher candidates. Adding to the homogeneity, all three participants happened to be female who were (coincidentally) former educational assistants (EAs). The participants differed, however, in age (approximately 22, 29, and 45), upbringing (urban/rural), experience in school setting (urban/rural), number/age of children, and marital status. In all three groups, the predictions of Finch and Lewis (2012) held true as participants seemed comfortable in discussing their shared experiences, while at the same time bringing their unique – and sometimes contradictory – perspectives into the discussions.

The size of the discussion groups was also determined based on the recommendations of Finch and Lewis (2012). While Finch and Lewis suggested that groups may include as many as eight participants, they made the following recommendations for choosing an appropriate number of participants to include in each group:

1. *The amount that group participants are likely to have to say on the research topic.* If they are likely to be highly engaged with or interested in it, or particularly articulate, a smaller group is desirable.
2. *The sensitivity or complexity of the issue.* Sensitive or complex issues are better tackled in smaller groups.
3. *The extent to which the researcher requires breadth or depth of data.* If breadth is key, for example, to reveal quickly the range of diversity and opinions on an issue, a larger group will be more effective. If depth is critical, a smaller group is better.
4. *The structure and tasks involved in the session.* A workshop approach, with specific tasks and subgroup work, is more effective with larger groups. (pp. 192 – 193)

Participants were not required to do any workshop-type activities so large groups were not necessary. Because I expected participants to be highly engaged and vocal on the topic, and that discussions would likely engender some sensitive and emotional responses, I chose to keep discussion groups between three and five participants. While I was open to enlarging the groups if necessary, three to five participants seemed to be appropriate as meaningful dialogue was continual and I was amazed at the balance of breadth and depth that was covered. All of the groups maintained a continual flowing conversation, and based on my observations, it appeared that most participants were able to contribute when they wished to add something. This seemed to indicate that the group size provided an excellent balance between in-depth discussions while still allowing insights from multiple perspectives to be shared.

Engagement with the Fable

For this study, I created an original fable (Exhibit A) centering around two horses who retell some of their experiences on a training ranch. The characters in the fable were intentionally nameless and geographical locations were only referred to generally. It was my hope that nameless animals, speaking about hypothetical events, in fictional locales, would help separate readers from specific real-life characters while simultaneously enabling them to identify with the principles and policies that underlie the story. The fable was written in simple language (about grade six level according to the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Scale) and provided enough detail to allow just about any young person or adult to understand and intelligently discuss the educational issues represented.

Participants individually read *The Foal and the Ranch* and then gathered together in small groups to discuss the fable. Data relating to how the participants felt about the impact and usefulness of the book were collected through survey responses using a Likert scale, and several open-ended questions (Appendix F). After the discussion, participants filled out another survey to explore their perceptions on how transformative the book combined with the discussion had been for them (Appendix G). Analysis of the data included both a direct and indirect approach.

For the direct approach, participants responded to survey questions in which they were specifically asked to what extent they felt they had been transformed by the process of reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. The survey also directly asked participants about their views on the usefulness of the fable as a tool for enhancing discussion on educational issues. Indirect data collection involved observing the participants willingness to contribute to the

discussions and exploring the depth of the participants' comments and insights to substantiate the levels of dialogue that actually occurred. In order to facilitate discussion, the researcher had access to discussion questions (Appendix H), but these questions were rarely necessary as participants stayed on task and engaged throughout. In all three discussion groups, dialogue about relevant educational issues had to be curtailed for the sake of time. The various indirect and direct uses of the fable were then used to explore the capability of the fable to transform participants and yield meaningful discourse on important educational topics.

In summary, the research questions were answered in two ways: First, survey questions were utilized to discover the participants' perceptions on their own transformation, as well as whether or not they felt the fable was useful. And second, the data gleaned from anecdotal evidence during the group discussions were used to explore the levels of dialogue that were generated among participants as they responded to educational issues presented in the fable. Specifically, comments made by participants were measured according to the affective learning rubric that had been created based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning (Appendix B). The results from the survey questions and the group discussions were merged in order to provide more complete answers to the research questions.

Coding Process

In order to enhance the breadth and depth of findings, some researchers believed that multiple coding methods should be used (Mello, 2002), while others advocated against coding altogether (Dey, 1999). For this study, I followed what Saldana (2009) referred to as "pragmatic eclecticism" (p. 47). Pragmatic eclecticism involves waiting until after the data collection and review stages are completed before deciding on which (if any) coding method(s) would be appropriate.

After collecting all data and reviewing the transcripts, it was my determination that I would begin by pre-coding the data. Pre-coding involved scanning the transcripts for notable words, phrases or quotes, and highlighting them for future consideration and application. The pre-coding allowed me to ascertain a general feeling for the whole, which led me to the first cycle coding. Using simultaneous coding (multiple codes applied to the same datum) when necessary, I used descriptive codes to categorize participant comments. Saldana (2009) defined descriptive codes as a word or phrase that identifies the topic being discussed. After assigning all descriptive codes, I repeated the first cycle coding process and assigned sub-codes where

needed. Following the descriptive coding, versus codes were used to show binary relationships. Unlike descriptive codes, versus codes identify a struggle and/or power relationship between two parties (i.e., teachers versus policy makers). The meta-data analysis happened during the second phase where I used pattern coding to pull the material together. The pattern coding involved grouping similar descriptive codes together in a more unified and concise manner that was more conducive to meaningful analysis. A complete explanation of each phase of the coding process is outlined below.

Pre-coding

I began the process of analyzing the data by pre-coding the discussion group transcripts. During this phase, I went through the data and underlined, circled, or used quotation marks to indicate notable passages (Creswell, 2007). Some of these noteworthy comments were later used to support the research findings and conclusions.

First-cycle Coding

First-cycle coding began by assigning descriptive codes to participant comments. Descriptive codes were chosen as they lend themselves well to the pattern analysis I intended to utilize during the second cycle. During descriptive coding, the need emerged to code certain binary conflicts that indicated “an asymmetrical power balance” between parties (Saldana, 2009, p. 94). These binaries were simultaneously coded with the descriptive codes using versus codes. The descriptive codes were then revisited and, where helpful, sub-codes were applied.

Second-cycle Coding

In order to group the codes into more meaningful sets of themes, pattern coding was used (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Pattern coding enabled me to pull together large amounts of data and to categorize the descriptive codes into patterns that were conducive to analysis. A sample of how group “A” data were coded is provided (Appendix I).

Data analysis

Once all data had been collected and coded, I summarized the content of each discussion group. The comments made by participants regarding the contents of the fable, as well as my observations of participants as they interacted, was assessed based on Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) revised version of Bloom’s taxonomy in both cognitive and affective learning domains. The taxonomy of cognitive learning (Appendix C) was primarily used to explore the levels of learning displayed by individual participants. The rubric for the affective domain (Appendix B)

was used to explore the levels of dialogue that occurred between participants in discussion groups.

For the purpose of this study, dialogue was considered *meaningful* if participants operated in the first three levels of affective learning (Receiving, Responding, and Valuing), whereas the highest two levels (Organization and Characterization) constituted *productive* dialogue. The underlying distinguishing characteristics were that meaningful dialogue occurred when participants listened, shared, and sought to understand the perspectives of other participants, while productive dialogue involved action, or the creation of an action plan. Results from the separate assessments were merged with the survey findings to create a holistic view on the perspectives of participants, and then crystalized with my own explanation and deconstruction of the fable to inform the discussion and implications of this dissertation.

Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter, I presented the definitions, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions I used in this dissertation. Approaching this study from a constructivist ontological stance and a participatory epistemological worldview, I recruited 11 stakeholders in education to participate in this qualitative study. This project has five phases:

1. I wrote the fable, *The Foal and the Ranch*.
2. Participants read *The Foal and the Ranch*.
3. I deconstructed the fable using real-life policies as well as instruments from the toolkit provided in Chapter Two (Chapter Four).
4. Through surveys and discussion, I collected qualitative data from participants' responses to *The Foal and the Ranch* (Chapter 5). The data were used to answer the following research questions:
 - 4.1. To what extent do educational stakeholders perceive they were transformed by their experience reading and discussing a fable about educational issues?
 - 4.2. What levels of dialogue are displayed as participants offer their observations, perceptions, and recommendations in response to reading and collectively interacting with a selected fable?
5. I crystalized the findings from my own deconstruction with the findings from the responses of participants and merged them to generate discussion and implications (Chapter 6).

After reading *The Foal and the Ranch*, participants gathered together in one of three discussion groups to talk about the fable. The purpose of the research was to discover the extent of perceived transformation felt by the participants as a result of the fable, and to explore the levels of dialogue in which the participants engaged within each of the discussion groups.

Along with pre-discussion and post-discussion survey results, data were also collected from the nature and content of discussion groups. The dialogue from each group was transcribed and coded to recognize themes and analyse findings from each discussion group. Individual participant's perception of the degree of transformation was identified through self-assessments as well as Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning. The levels of dialogue in each group was assessed based on Bloom's taxonomy of affective learning where the lower three levels of affective learning were categorized as meaningful dialogue, and the higher two levels constituted productive dialogue. Analysis of individual findings, group comparisons, and my own deconstruction of the fable are crystalized to inform the discussion and implications of this dissertation.

Chapter 4: Deconstruction of *The Foal and the Ranch*

In Part I of this chapter, I offer empirical data, legal documents, and existing educational policies to show the real-life foundations for the incidents described in *The Foal and the Ranch*. This section includes an exploration of giftedness, the purpose of public education in Saskatchewan, justice in schools, PISA results, and policies pertaining to home-based education. In Part II, I use the concepts provided in the toolkit from Chapter Two of this dissertation to deconstruct the fable. Whereas *The Foal and the Ranch* provided a representative example from the humanities – the beliefs, feelings, and human constructs of education, Chapter Four provides the background and rational evidence related to selected educational issues. The chapter also deconstructs the events and descriptions expressed through *The Foal and the Ranch*. In essence, the author of *The Foal and the Ranch* took real life experiences and described these in a fictional setting. This fourth chapter takes the fictional stories from the fable and gives them a footing in the real world.

Part I: Real Life Background to Fable: *The Foal and the Ranch*

The events in *The Foal and the Ranch* were largely based on my experiences in the field of education. This section explores some of the existing policies, practices, and philosophies that created these situations, and provides the real-life foundation for many of the fictional events. The specific issues that will be examined are the purpose of education in Saskatchewan, policies that affect school operations, justice and equity in schools, and home-based educational policies. The section begins by exploring one of the underlying themes of *The Foal and the Ranch*, education for gifted students.

Giftedness

One of the implied messages of *The Foal and the Ranch* is that gifted students have unique needs that are often overlooked in a regular classroom setting. The following sections address the question of giftedness as an exceptionality, explores the results of studies that attempted to answer if the needs of gifted students have been met, and examines some of the dire consequences that can occur if the exceptional needs of gifted students are not met.

Is Giftedness an Exceptionality

By definition, exceptional children are those who are somehow different from their peers in a specific setting. Within the educational system, students who are different from the norm are considered to have *special needs* (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). Like students with autism,

ADHD, dyslexia, or any other exceptionality, gifted students have special needs that must be met if they are to sufficiently progress academically and remain healthy psychologically (Marland, 1972; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Woolfolk, et al., 2009; Hutchinson, 2010; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). After studying 400, 000 students across all 50 states, Assistant Secretary for Education in the United States, Dr. Sydney Marland (1972) wrote:

Gifted and Talented children are, in fact, deprived and can suffer psychological damage and permanent impairment of their abilities to function well which is equal to or greater than the similar deprivation suffered by any other population with special needs served by the Office of Education. (pp. xi-xii)

This psychological damage and permanent impairment may range from relatively minor character flaws to depression and suicide. Early educational researchers listed negative effects as poor work habits (Terman & Oden, 1954), and learned laziness due to an effortless existence (Hollingworth, 1930). These negative traits alone would be cause for concern for many parents and those who concur with John Locke (1964) who believed that “the great thing to be minded in education is what habits you settle” (p. 33). Unfortunately, the damage often goes well beyond poor work habits.

More recent studies concluded that there are additional consequences to neglecting the needs of gifted students: frustration, anxiety, social isolation, low self-esteem, social rejection, loneliness, phobias, underachievement, and depression (Silverman, 1987; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Marland, 1972). As a result, gifted students have shown disproportionately high incidents of suicides, school dropouts, and imprisonment (Kaskaloglu, 2003; Marland, 1972; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Woolfolk, et al., 2009; Hirshfeld-Flores, 2000). Gifted girls are additionally at risk as they had a dropout rate twice as high as gifted boys (Marland, 1972). Researcher indicates that gifted children need some type of specialized instruction if they are to avoid these dismal consequences (Marland, 1972; Renzulli, 2012; Neihart et al., 2002). Marland’s report concluded:

Gifted are the most retarded group in the schools when mental age and chronological ages are compared. Great discrepancies existed during this study, and continue to persist, between what the gifted child knows and what he is offered...This ensuing boredom leads to underachievement and unworthy patterns of functioning, along with dissatisfaction with oneself and others. . . . If one

considers specialized gifted education to be unfair, then that person would have to consider all special education to be unfair. (p. III – 3)

The importance of providing children with an appropriate education was recognized by Locke (1964) who wrote that “90% of man whether good or evil, useful or not, is due to formal education” (p. 25). Locke added that a teacher must maintain a student’s attention and “advance the student as fast as the learner’s abilities will carry him” or everything else the teacher does will serve no purpose (p. 175). Neglecting the needs of gifted students often leads to boredom causing a variety of ailments that hurt gifted students personally, and lead to behaviours that cost society as well.

Clearly, the distinct characteristics and special needs of gifted children qualify them as exceptional students who require supports and adjustments that are not needed for regular students. Studies by Marland (1972), Kaskaloglu (2003) and Friend and Bursuck (2009) have shown that the needs of gifted children have been neglected in schools and this neglect has led to high rates of suicide, incarceration, and school dropouts among gifted students. In addition, gifted students tended to suffer from boredom, violence, depression, and other detrimental effects beyond those who are intellectually closer to the average.

While preventing gifted students from dropping out of school, committing suicide, or perpetrating crimes may be in the best interests of society, is it the responsibility of the school system to meet the needs of gifted students? To ascertain if it is the responsibility of schools to meet the unique needs of gifted students – or the needs of any exceptional student – the purpose of education must be known. As this was one of the foundational issues of *The Foal and the Ranch*, a broad look at global, national, provincial, divisional, and school documents will be examined to ascertain the purpose of education in Saskatchewan.

The Purpose of Education

In his book, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?* Michael Sandel (2010) observed that “arguments about justice and rights are often arguments about the purpose” (p. 191). The policies in many jurisdictions dictate that educators fulfill the purpose by providing additional services or resources to specific groups. For example, in the United States, educational policies such as the *No Child Left Behind Act (2002)* and the *Race for the Top (2009)* initiative focus on all children meeting minimal standards, and resources are directed accordingly. In Finland, the goal of education is equitable outcomes for all students, so additional resources are directed to

those with special needs in order to close educational gaps (Sahlberg, 2011). As I will show, the purpose of education in Saskatchewan is unlike both of these nations. In this Province, all students have an equal claim to the resources they need to meet their potential, and all arguments about justice in the Saskatchewan school system must be viewed in this context.

Global, National, Provincial, and School Division Guidelines

Current educational practices in Saskatchewan classrooms are guided by international, national, provincial, and local guidelines and policies. Many governing bodies have produced documents pertaining to the application of gifted education.

United Nations. Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) sec (1) states that “Everyone has the right to education” and that, beyond elementary school, “higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” Section (2) mandated that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” The position of parents is also addressed in Section 3: “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” According to the U.N., parents need not be passive but can be advocates ensuring that their children receive an appropriate education.

In 2000, the members of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) agreed to meet six educational goals by the year 2015. As a member, Canada agreed to “meet the learning needs of all children” (UNESCO, n.p.). These documents clearly define education as a process that meets learning needs of all children enabling them to continuously develop intellectually.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) is a set of guidelines that protect the rights of all Canadian citizens from governmental organizations and employees. Section 15(1) of the *Charter* states that, “every individual is equal before the law and has the right to . . . equal benefit . . . without discrimination.” Therefore, the *Charter* logic provides that whatever benefit is promised to one student in a public school, equal benefit can be expected by every other student.

The Saskatchewan Education Act, 1995. The over-arching set of guidelines for education in Saskatchewan is contained in the 1995 *Education Act*. Sec 142(1a) states that “Every person . . . has the right to receive instruction appropriate to that person’s . . . educational achievement” [emphasis added]. Therefore, if a person is not provided with an appropriate

education, it is a violation of his or her rights, and that person would have a legal claim against the Province.

The following documents indicate that an appropriate education in Saskatchewan is one in which *all* students reach their *full potential*:

Actualization of core curriculum. In 1999, the Saskatchewan Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction Review wrote that "Our goal is to provide a school system where *all* children develop to their full potential, regardless of ethnic or racial origin, socio-economic class, gender, or intellectual or physical capacities" [emphasis added] (p.4).

School^{Plus}. In their 2004 document, *Toward School^{Plus}: Empowering High Schools as Communities of Learning and Support*, the ministry again confirmed the goal of education in the Province: "At the heart of the provincial education system in Saskatchewan is a commitment to providing quality learning opportunities and benefits for *every* young person. The aim is to support the development of the whole person to achieve his or her full potential" [emphasis added] (p.1).

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF). Article 12 of the STF Code of Professional Ethics (2006) states that it is the responsibility of all teachers "to encourage *each* student to reach the highest level of *individual* development" [emphasis added]

Assessment for learning. The 2009 conceptual framework for Assessment for Learning (AFL) in reading stated that "the goal of Saskatchewan Learning's Assessment for Learning Program is to increase learning and to raise the level of achievement for *all* students in the province" [emphasis added] (p. 1). Because the AFL goal pertains to reading, it will be revisited when Saskatchewan reading scores are examined further in this chapter.

The needs-based model. *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model to Support Student Achievement* (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2011) provided the framework for how the educational needs of all students – with or without special needs – are to be met within regular classrooms. The framework was summarized by saying that "The intent of this process is to ensure that . . . *all* students are provided with inclusive opportunities to reach their potential" [emphasis added] (p.1).

The Ministry of Education Funding Manual. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2012) provided guidelines for equitable decision making: "The ministry and boards of education

will make decisions that support *all* students in reaching their full potential” [emphasis added] (p. 58).

School division policies. Considering the above laws and policies, it is logical that the policies of school divisions also center on the potential of each individual student. Listed below are policies of several school divisions in Saskatoon and surrounding area:

Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division (GSCS). Under the heading of *Gospel Values* on their website, the GSCS stated that “Catholic education helps *all* children as they seek to reach *their full potential*” [emphasis added] (GSCS, n.d.).

Saskatoon Public School Division (SPSD). As part of their *Vision and Values*, the SPSPD declared that “*Every* individual will be valued. We will recognize that *every* person has personal, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual needs. We will . . . ensure that *all* members of our learning community have the opportunity to develop *their potential*” [emphasis added] (SPSPD, n.d.).

Sun West School Division (SWSD). The SWSD had a vision of “Success for *all*” and published a brochure with a message from Director/CEO, Dr. Guy Tetrault which stated, “We are committed to do everything we can in order to help them succeed to *their full potential*” (p. 1). Board Chair, Lorne Ulven added, “We will continue to do what is best for kids and to see that *each* and *every* student succeeds to the *best of their ability*” [emphasis added] (SWSD, 2012, p. 1).

Prairie Spirit School Division (PSSD). The PSSD has a mission of “Learning without limits in a world of possibilities” (PSSD, n.d.). Although worded slightly differently, learning without limits is no less ambitious of a goal than each child reaching his or her full potential.

Summary of education policies affecting Saskatchewan students. Following international and provincial guidelines, the Ministry of Saskatchewan, as well as many school divisions, make it clear that the intent of schools is *not* to have students achieve a common, minimum standard; the goal for Saskatchewan education is that every child reaches his or her full potential. With the purpose of education known, it is now possible to examine justice and equity as they pertain to public school students in the Province.

Injustice, Justice, and Equity in Schools

In Sandel’s (2010) book, *Justice*, he asserted that Aristotle taught that justice was giving people what they deserve. Similarly, Stone (2002) wrote that “who gets what, when, and how”

(p. 39) are the practical questions that must be answered in the attempt to equitably distribute resources. Because of their educational purposes, all American children ought to reach a minimum standard; Finnish students can expect equal outcomes; and Saskatchewan school children have a right to reach their potential. Before discussing justice in schools, however, it is valuable to briefly view the opposite, injustice, because, as John Stuart Mill (2000) said, “it is easier to define unjust” (p. 55).

Definition of injustice. The promise of the Saskatchewan government is to help all children reach his or her potential; the following quotes must therefore be read in this context: Mill (2000) said that “It is unjust to break faith with anyone: to violate an engagement, either express or implied, or disappoint expectations raised by our conduct” (p. 58). Similarly, in *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes (2008) stated that “The definition of INJUSTICE, is no other than the not performance of covenant” [emphasis in original] (p. 95). Mill and Hobbes agreed that injustice is failing to do what was promised. Saskatchewan educational bodies have agreed to provide the resources for every child to reach his or her potential, therefore, anything less is an injustice. The question remains, however, what is justice in Saskatchewan schools?

Justice in schools. A utilitarian view of justice may indicate that schools should be organized in such a way as to seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. In *Utilitarianism*, Mill (2000) argued that actions are right to the extent that they promote overall happiness. This approach caters to the typical or normal children in a classroom and ignores the exceptional children on the high and low ends of the achievement/intelligence continuum. Such an arrangement would yield a much more homogeneous student population and would reduce the educational cost per student as well as negating much of the necessity for differentiated instruction and inclusive education. At first glance, it may appear that the utilitarian theory espoused by Mill would favour typical children because, all other things being equal, improving their lot would increase overall utility the most because they comprise the majority of the population, but this is not necessarily the case.

Helping the greatest number of people is an incomplete view of utilitarianism because humans have different natural endowments, so increasing the happiness of more people does not necessarily correspond to increasing total happiness. Mill (2000) acknowledged differences between people when he said that “a being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy [and] is capable probably of more acute suffering . . . than one of inferior type” (17). Therefore,

one unit of resources may add different amount of utility to different people across the academic spectrum. Conversely, withholding resources may cause different amounts of suffering as well.

The matter of utility is further complicated when considering the responsibilities of the individual and the responsibilities of society. Mill (2000) stated that if privileged people were deprived of some resource so that someone less privileged could benefit, this knowledge would bring the privileged happiness, thus increasing overall happiness (this logic may not be reversed, however, as the less-intelligent may not fully understand what he or she lost or what the privileged gained). Having the privileged willingly give up benefits, nevertheless, is not the same as policy makers imposing the sacrifice upon the privileged. Agreeing with Aristotle, Mill stated that “it is universally considered just that each person should obtain that (whether good or evil) which he *deserves*; and unjust that he should be made to undergo an evil, which he does not deserve” (p. 57).

As was shown earlier, research has indicated that gifted students who do not receive appropriately differentiated instruction often suffer negative consequences. Knowing that neglecting the special needs of gifted students increases the likelihood of various disorders, it would seem that Mill would say that an educational system would be unjust if it subjected its students to these evils without their consent (although it may be questioned whether the same negative results would have resulted if the privileged willingly gave up their rights to an appropriate education for the sake of those less privileged). Withholding appropriate education penalizes gifted students for their innate abilities and “it is unjust to punish someone for that which he cannot help” (Mill, 2000, p. 70). Depriving a person of a necessity (whether food, water, or mental stimulation) may be a worse sentence than inflicting pain, and may be one of the more cruel punishments of all. Balancing individual rights with the common good led Mill to ask a similar question to one asked by Aristotle centuries before.

Aristotle (1966) claimed that the purpose of the state was to create the good life for its citizens. He claimed that “equals ought to have equality. But there remains a question, equality or inequality of what?” (p. 1193). Similarly, Mill (2000) asked, “Is it just to give higher compensation to higher achievers or robbery to deny it?” (pp. 72-3). Mill answered his own question: “Social utility alone can decide the preference” (p. 73). In Canadian democracy, it is desirable that elected officials make policies that represent their constituents and maximize social utility. Through their *NCLB* policy, the United States government has chosen to focus on those

who are at, or below, minimal proficiency. Whether the *NCLB Act* maximizes social utility or not, critics of utilitarianism such as Sandel (2010) believed that the utilitarian approach “can run roughshod over individual people” and argued that “human rights and dignity have a moral basis that lies beyond utility” (p. 37). The Saskatchewan government seemed to recognize this moral obligation as its policy does not favour students at any position of the achievement or intelligence continuum – the promise to reach individual potential is given to all students.

Individual dignity and rights leads to a much more individualistic and long-term view of justice. The positions of Immanuel Kant and Mill were succinctly summarized by Sandel (2010): Kant believed that all individuals are an end in themselves – each individual must be treated with the dignity and respect he or she deserves as a valuable human being. Mill argued that maximizing utility in the short-run by doing what was convenient or cheaper will often reduce utility in the long-run, making everyone less happy. In fact, contrary to just doing what is easiest, Sandel (2010) recapitulated Kant’s position by saying that “doing something because it is right, not because it’s useful or pleasing or convenient – confers moral worth on something” (p. 114). It may not be convenient or cheap to provide every child with an appropriate education that will enable him or her to reach his or her full potential, but, because it has been promised, it is right – anything less has no moral worth.

Equity in schools. Closely linked to justice is the principle of equity. In the process of determining what each person deserves, most people acknowledge that, for various reasons, equitable treatment does not always mean that everyone receives an equal share (Stone, 2002). However, there has been disagreement about who should be favoured in education. Aristotle (1941) believed that the best education should be given to the highest achieving students. Contrary to Aristotle, John Rawls (1999) believed that “more resources are to be spent on educating the less intelligent (at least in the early years) unless the advancement of the gifted leads to the advancement of the common good” (p. 86). In his book, *The Good Society*, Harvard Professor Emeritus, John Kenneth Galbraith (1996) stated that “the best in education should be for those in the worst of social situations” (70). In *Creating Capabilities*, Martha Nussbaum (2011) argued that no one should experience discrimination or marginalization for any reason, and that appropriate education is a right for all people. As has been shown, Saskatchewan policy-makers have determined that an appropriate education provides every child with the

resources to reach his or her potential, but Nussbaum wrote that supporting potential takes one more action.

Nussbaum (2011), like Kant, believed that the goal of social justice is to treat each person as an end, and to discover “what each person is able to do and to be” (p. 18). John Dewey (1909) took it a step further and said that it is immoral to not recognize and develop individual strengths. In *Examined Life*, Nussbaum (2009) said that Aristotle was right, “It’s the job of a good political arrangement to provide each and every person with what they need to become capable of living rich and flourishing human lives” (p. 117). Nussbaum wrote that “all entitlements . . . must actively support people’s capabilities, not just fail to set up obstacles. In the absence of action, rights are mere words on paper” (p. 65). Appropriate education, then, is one that not only provides all resources for the realization of each student’s potential, it also removes all obstacles that would prevent a child from reaching his or her potential.

At this point, a pragmatic observer would likely point out that the financial cost of entitling all students to reach their full potential is incalculable, and economic principles dictate that eventually scarcity will limit available resources. When deciding how resources will be allocated, Rawls (2001) suggested that policy-makers would most likely make just decisions if they imagined how proposed policies would apply to all people in various scenarios.

The original position, the veil of ignorance, and the difference principle. Rawls (2001) thought Aristotle was unjust (p. 87) because economic and social inequalities must be controlled to prevent the domination of one class of society over another (p. 130). To do this, Rawls proposed that policy makers return to a theoretical “original position” and put on a “veil of ignorance” (pp. 14-5). Wearing the veil of ignorance, one would not know what station of life one will occupy. The theory posits that if one does not know his or her own gender, race, intelligence, etc., one will make fair policies. In general Rawls (1999) believed that policies should favour those who did not receive the advantage of natural endowments. This belief is similar to the utilitarian view, but Rawls (2001) also acknowledged the difference principle - individual natural endowments, while undeserved, should be developed fully, and the benefits of such gifts should be distributed in ways that help the most disadvantaged.

It is difficult to apply Rawls’ (2001) difference principle to Saskatchewan education because of the context in which modern education operates. Helping all children reach their potential is an idealistic policy that may have been created from the original position under a veil

of ignorance, but the current form of democracy does not require those who achieve greater status to compensate those who, because of fewer natural endowments, do not reach similar status. Therefore, Rawls (2001) would likely consider the current system unjust.

The application of the difference principle to Saskatchewan education is also difficult because Rawls' (2001) theory presupposes that the economic principle of scarcity would dictate that providing resources for the high-achieving child to further excel would require depriving resources to a lower-achieving child. Ministry policies show no indication of limited resources, so, according to policy, no one should suffer due to lack of funding. Neglecting to acknowledge limited funding has created a disparity between educational policy and classroom practice in Saskatchewan. This disparity can clearly be seen by applying the veil of ignorance.

Based on the original position and the veil of ignorance, if a system is fair, it should not matter what station a person occupies when entering the system – he or she should have equal opportunity to attain the outcome intended by the system. Consequently, in Saskatchewan, achievement would not be the same (the difference principle), but regardless of one's race, sex, or intelligence; the opportunity to reach individual potential should be identical for everyone. Common sense suggests that whoever gets the most teacher attention and receives the most educational resources will have the greatest chance of reaching his or her potential. In my experience, the majority of help and resources go to those who are struggling, not to those that enter the classroom already knowing most of the content. This inequity violates the purpose of Saskatchewan education by positioning certain children in an advantageous position to reach their potential, therefore it probably would not be a practice endorsed by Rawls' veil of ignorance theory. Adding to the question of fairness, I have often heard about and personally witnessed that gifted students are often called upon to help other students who are struggling with the material. The practice of having students assist other students raises another meaningful issue regarding justice in Saskatchewan classrooms.

Helping others less fortunate than oneself has been a noble principle for centuries. Nearly 2000 years ago, the Bible recorded that people brought their belongings to Jesus' disciples who distributed them "unto every man according as he had need" (KJV, Acts. 4:35). In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Karl Marx (1875) made a similar statement that became the mantra of the communist movement: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Part 1, n.p.). The actions of both yield a similar result: those with more provide

for those with less. The difference is that one system is voluntary; while the other is obligated by law. To answer if either system is just in the classroom, one must again return to the purpose of education. Whether high-achieving students volunteer or are made to help lower-achieving students, it can only be just if it helps all students involved reach their full potential. The next section will attempt to determine if all students are reaching their potential by examining recent academic performances of Saskatchewan students on international reading tests.

How are Gifted Students in Saskatchewan Performing?

In *The Republic*, Plato (2009) stated that “things that are healthy produce health . . . and things which are unhealthy produce disease. . . . So does acting justly produce justice and acting unjustly produce injustice” (p. 142). Because schools have no instrument to measure student potential (L. BurrIDGE, Superintendent of Programs and Instruction: Student Achievement & Supports Branch: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, personal communication, April 26, 2013), perhaps the closest measurement to judge the effectiveness of education in the province is to compare achievement outcomes over time. While improved achievement does not necessarily equate to achieving potential, it may be assumed that if achievement improves, the individual is closer to his or her potential than had the improvement not occurred. Conversely, if achievement worsens, individuals are likely to be further from their potential. Therefore, if the system is just, Aristotle would likely anticipate that the high achievers will do increasingly better. For Rawls, justice would be shown by an improvement in the scores of the lowest achievers (since there is no mechanism for redistribution). And, like the Ministry of Education, Nussbaum would expect that in a just system, the achievement scores of all students increase. As will be shown, however, it is unlikely that, based on achievement, any of these people would consider the Saskatchewan educational system to be just.

PISA scores. In 1997, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) began the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA was designed to help government officials measure educational progress internationally as well as within national borders. The assessment tests 15 year old students and provides scores in reading, mathematics, and science as well as an overall national score. In 2009, over 470, 000 students from 65 countries participated, including approximately 23,000 students (representing about 1000 schools) in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010). The statistics are broken down into sub-categories and countries are ranked accordingly. Similar trends appeared across all three

disciplines, but because the government of Saskatchewan placed special emphasis on increasing achievement in reading with the AFL initiative, I will focus on reading scores.

Table 1 shows the PISA combined reading results for Saskatchewan students. Included are the 2000 and 2009 overall averages, as well as the percent of students who achieved at the highest level (Level 5). For comparison, results for Canada and Alberta are also provided.

Table 1

Comparison of PISA Results for Reading, 2000 & 2009 (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2010)

	Reading Score		% change	% above 625 (Level 5)		% change from 2000 to 2009
	2000	2009		2000	2009	
Saskatchewan	529	504	(4.7)	14.0	8.7	(37.9)
Alberta	550	533	(3.1)	22.5	16.1	(28.4)
Canada	534	524	(1.9)	16.8	12.8	(23.8)

As indicated by Table 1, average national reading scores declined slightly (-1.9%) from 2000 to 2009. Over the same time frame, Saskatchewan scores dropped 4.7% - about 2.5 times the national average. The notable change in performance, however, can be seen in the scores of the highest achievers. Canada saw 23.8% fewer students achieve Level 5 reading scores while the number of Saskatchewan high achievers fell by nearly 38%. In spite of dropping over 28%, Alberta still had nearly twice the percentage of high achievers as Saskatchewan in 2009. Across the country – and especially in Saskatchewan – 2009 witnessed considerably fewer students who were able to reach the highest level of achievement in reading.

From a utilitarian point of view, if it is assumed that reading score equals utility, overall utility in both Canada and Saskatchewan declined slightly over the duration of the study. In spite of the large drop in high achievers, some, like Marx and Rawls, might have argued that a 5.3% drop in Saskatchewan students achieving at Level 5 is desirable if it corresponded to a similar decrease in those performing at Level 1. Table 2, however, shows the change in PISA scores across all five levels, and the percentage of children achieving at the lowest levels had increased (Statistics Canada, 2001, 2010).

Table 2

PISA Results, Percent of Saskatchewan students at each reading level, 2000 & 2009

Level 1			Level 2			Level 3			Level 4			Level 5		
'00	'09	+/-	'00	'09	+/-	'00	'09	+/-	'00	'09	+/-	'00	'09	+/-
9.3	15.5	+6.2	19.2	22.9	+3.7	29.8	30.1	+3	27.8	22.8	-5	14	8.7	-5.3

Table 2 indicates that 9.9% more students were at Levels 1 and 2, 10.3% fewer students were achieving at Levels 4 and 5, and the percentage of students achieving at Level 3 remained nearly constant. Implications of this data are noteworthy considering the OECD (2010) described Level 1 readers as those who will have difficulties functioning in the labour market while Level 5 readers are those who will most likely offer the greatest contributions to future society (p. 12). Using achievement as the measure, based on the trend in reading scores in Saskatchewan, neither the common good nor any special interests seem to have been served.

Returning to justice and the purpose of education in Saskatchewan, the above data are a measurement of student achievement, not potential. The findings do not, therefore, directly disparage Saskatchewan public schools or the practice of having high-ability students help those of lower ability. It is possible that in 2009, 5% fewer children had the potential to achieve Level 5; while simultaneously 6% more children did not have the potential to reach Level 2. Logically, one may question a system in which achievement has either remained stagnant or worsened for each level of reading; but because the Ministry cannot measure individual potential, it is difficult to accurately judge the justice – or injustice – of the provincial educational system.

Using Home-Based Education Policy to Better Understand Educational Philosophy

Although the policies pertaining to home-based educators are primarily directed towards those who choose to educate their child(ren) at home, the *Home-Based Education Policy Manual* written by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2013) also articulates the philosophy of education underlying all educational policy in the Province. Perhaps that single phrase that summarizes the government's philosophy concerning education is that the right to home educate one's children "does not include the right not to educate one's children" (p. 91). As will be shown, regardless of if a child is educated at home or at school, or if the child has learning difficulties or is gifted; no educational institution in the Province has the legal right to not

educate a child. This foundational principle can be found throughout Ministry policy concerning home-based educators and can be applied to any educator in Saskatchewan.

The compelling interest of the state in the education of all children. Ministry policy clearly indicates that the government has assumed the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that every child in the Province is educated. This philosophy is emphasized in the Ministry's (2013) *Home-Based Education Policy Manual* which repeatedly states that "In view of the compelling interest of the state in the education of *all* children . . .]" [emphasis added] (pp. 11, 14, 26). In using these words, the Ministry of Education was following the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada. The Ministry quoted Justice La Forest who, in *Jones v. The Queen*, said that the seven justices unanimously concurred that "The interest of the state in education of children is compelling" (as cited by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 92). Mr. Justice La Forest went on to cite the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), 47 U.S. 48 (p. 49) of the United States which stated:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society...In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. (as cited by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 92)

Because the underlying educational philosophy is the same for all children in the Province, it is not unreasonable to equitably apply policies to all children, educators, and educational settings. In the *Home-Based Education Policy Manual*, the Ministry (2013) verified that the guidelines must be impartial and that the implementation of policies "reflects the principles of fundamental justice and administrative fairness" (p. 39). In order to be justly applied, the following policies which outline the duties of home-based educators, and the consequences of failing to meet these duties, must be applied to the educators of all children, regardless of what setting the education was to have taken place (i.e. home or school). Section 12(4a) of the *Education Act* (1995), states that a home-based education program "is not required or expected to provide learning opportunities to achieve all the goals of education for Saskatchewan" whereas students are expected to achieve all of the goals in public schools. If

any educational provider is to be held to greater accountability, therefore, the law dictates that it is public schools that have the loftier responsibilities.

Applying policies of home-based education to public schools. The goal of Saskatchewan public schools has been discussed at length and I will now explore some of the guidelines imposed on home-based educators and how these policies could be applied in a public school setting. As it was a recurring theme in the fable, I will begin by exploring educational expectations for children with exceptional needs. This will lead to consideration of the expected outcomes and judging the effectiveness of instructional adjustments. Along with the above, I will also address the consequences that may be imposed on home-based educators who fail to meet the designated standards. After summarizing the educational policies regarding home-based education, I will utilize the linguistic toolkit from Chapter Two as I deconstruct the events described in *The Foal and the Ranch*.

Appropriate adjustments for exceptional children. Policy A.5 of the *Home-Based Education Policy Manual* states that when an intensive needs assessment has been conducted, the home-based educator becomes responsible for making appropriate instructional adjustments to the home-based learner's program (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013). If the home-based educator does not make appropriate adjustments, the registration of the program may not be renewed, or may it may be cancelled immediately (p. 27).

If this policy is applied to a public school setting, it would mean that if a teacher fails to make appropriate instructional adjustments for a student with special needs, that teacher will no longer be allowed to oversee the instruction of that child. Whether or not this consequence extends to the school no longer being allowed to enrol the child is possible but unclear. In order to understand and implement this policy, an understanding of how *appropriate* is determined becomes necessary.

Whether or not a teacher made *appropriate* adjustments is to be ascertained by the achievement of the student. Policy A.6 states that "monitoring shall focus on educational outcomes rather than on educational processes" (p. 30). By this policy, regardless of what differentiated instruction a teacher may have made, or claimed to have made, it is student outcomes that will determine if the teacher's adjustments were appropriate or not. The *Policy Manual* goes on to describe how the standard for student outcomes is to be established.

Standard for student outcomes. The level of acceptable student outcomes is to be based on the written education plan of the educator (*Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Home-Based Education Policy Manual*, 2013, p. 30). For home-educators, this is the written educational plan that must be submitted for each individual child prior to each school year. In the case of public schools, this would be the Provincial curriculum. If a student attending public school is not reaching curriculum objectives, the learning environment and instructional methods must be deemed unsatisfactory, and the Ministry is obligated to remove the child from this setting.

Beyond grade-based curriculum outcomes, home-educators are compelled to provide an education that is appropriate not only for the age of the learner, but also for the ability of any particular learner (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 30). If a home-educated student is not provided with instruction appropriate to his or her achievement and abilities, again, the privilege of home-schooling may be revoked by the Ministry. For this policy to be applied justly to all educators, all children must receive an appropriate education or the educators involved may lose the opportunity to be involved in schooling children. This policy would not only apply to those with learning difficulties, it would also apply to gifted students who are well beyond their same-aged peers, and every child in between.

Summary of home-based education policy and how it is to be justly applied. Policy 14(1) summarizes the guidelines for which a home-based education program must comply or risk being terminated (due to irrelevance to this study, administrative requirements such as registration guidelines have been omitted):

A registering authority may cancel the registration of a home-based education program in accordance with this section if the registering authority can substantiate all or any of the following:

- (d) that the home-based learner is not making satisfactory progress in relation to:
 - (i) the written education plan or improvement plan; or
 - (ii) the home-based learner's age and ability. (p. 37)

If this policy is to “reflect the principles of fundamental justice and administrative fairness” then the guidelines must apply equally to all educational institutions in the province (p. 39). Further, the Ministry has stated that educators in public schools are expected to have the students in their system perform to higher standards than those educated at home, so whatever

burden of proof rests with home-based educators, there is a higher burden of proof for school teachers.

Additional evidence that educational policies must be equitably applied to all children can be found in the Saskatchewan court ruling of *The Queen v. Cline*. Justice Young offered the following comment concerning home educators: “The Saskatchewan *Education Act* must now be read in light of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. *The Education Act* when read as a whole also has the underlying principle of equality of education throughout the province” (K.J. Young, P.C.J. *Her Majesty the Queen v. Elizabeth Cline* (Saskatchewan provincial court at Turtleford, Saskatchewan, December 20, 1988), p. 13, as cited by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 97). While certain applications of the *Charter* and the *Education Act* have been shown to be problematic as they pertain to gifted students, it was clearly the intent of Justice Young that home schoolers and children who attend public school are to be treated equally, and speculating on the effects of applying home-school policies to public education is reasonable.

Summary of Part I

Part I of Chapter Four provided the real-life foundation for the issues raised in *The Foal and the Ranch*. Using student giftedness as an example, research has shown that although international, national, provincial, and divisional policies mandate that schools equally help all children reach their potential, school practice favours some students over others. This injustice has led to fewer Saskatchewan students reaching the highest levels of achievement and more students achieving at the lowest two reading levels. Home-based education policies set forth the expectations of the government for the education of all children in the Province, as well as the consequences for educators if these expectations are not met. If home-education policies were to be applied to public schools, certain teachers would no longer be allowed the privilege of attempting to educate students who fall short of their potential. These findings provide the real-life underpinnings for *The Foal and the Ranch*, and help explain why the issues found in the fable are relevant to public education in Saskatchewan.

Part II: Deconstruction of the Fable: *The Foal and the Ranch*

The Foal and the Ranch was written to help expose confounding language, reveal paradoxes, and recognize fallacious thinking, in the hopes that overcoming these obstacles would lead to productive discussion among educational stakeholders. Because some stories contained multiple lessons, I will closely examine the flawed logic, fallacies, and harmful literary devices presented in three of the main scenarios in the fable: the sick horses, the swimming lessons, and the accountant. In other cases, the breaches in logic will be categorized and addressed as they were in the toolkit: *Literary Devices and Paradoxes*, *Critical Examination of Language*, and *Identifying Flawed Logic and Fallacies*. This section will conclude as the fable did, with the exploration of home-based education policies and what might happen if these policies were to be applied to public schools.

Lessons from the Sick Horses and the Green Dress

In chapter two of *The Foal and the Ranch*, the foal asked how Ranches began. Grandad replied with the cryptic response that Ranches started “with the best of intentions.” This led to Grandad pointing out to his grandson that many foals had been born lame that spring and had to be put down. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that the medicine that saved the sick mares caused their foals to be born lame. The question that faced the owners of the sick mares became *who do you want to survive, the mare or her foal?* The point of the story was not for readers to attempt to correctly answer the question, but to show that the actions of the owners must be congruent with their answer to the question because it is their actions, not their words, that will determine the outcomes.

Similarly, in chapter three, the owner’s wife would gaze at the shop window lamenting that she wanted that green dress “more than anything.” Unfortunately for her, the largest dress available was two sizes too small for her. To console herself over the fact that she could not fit into the dress, she routinely gorged herself on sugary treats from the local bakery. It is from these stories that the quote emerged: “Outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions.” For this purpose of this dissertation, I will not ruminate outside factors over which a person has no control, but only discuss the impact of a person’s words compared to the impact of a person’s actions. This leads to the premise of the fable that it does not matter what we *say* we want, it is what we *do* that determines the results we get.

The reality that our outcomes come from our actions, not our words, is exemplified both in the story and in real life when we compare the actions and words of other educational systems. In Saskatchewan, we may say the goal of education is for all children to reach their full potential, but if we model our system after that of the region from the South (the United States) and implement wide-spread standardized testing, heterogeneous classrooms, standardized curriculum, minimal achievement expectations, etc.; it is not reasonable to believe that our outcomes will be significantly different than theirs.

Similarly, if Saskatchewan educators say they want results like the schools in the East (Finland), but implement policy contrary to those found in Finland (longer school days, teachers only required to have a bachelor's degree, state mandated curriculum, longer school years, etc.), it is a non sequitur to imagine that our outcomes will mirror those of Finland. If Saskatchewan has a different goal of education than the United States, we must implement different policies and practices than those south of the border. If we want similar outcomes to those emerging from Finland, we have to imitate their conditions and we cannot cherry pick the policies and practices of which we approve and ignore the others. We, in Saskatchewan, must decide our educational goals and design our educational system toward that end – it is our actions, not our intentions, which will determine the educational outcomes for our children and our province.

Lessons from the Swimming Pool

Along with revealing the problematic nature of inclusive classrooms and differentiated instruction in understaffed settings, the story of the swimming lessons also showed the spotlight fallacy, cherry picking, the appeal to emotion, and the appeal to ignorance.

Spotlight fallacy and cherry picking. In chapter 9 of the fable, the mayor confronted the swimming lesson administrator with the fact that few of the students taking swimming lessons were making any significant progress. The administrator responded by saying that a girl who has taken two years of lessons in this program several years ago recently won a bronze medal at the Olympics. This was a spotlight fallacy as it implied that all the alumni from the swimming program were equally successful. It was also cherry picking as the administrator refused to acknowledge any contradictory examples of children who did not succeed in the program.

Appeal to emotion and the appeal to ignorance. The swimming lesson administrator went on to appeal to the emotion of the mayor by asking, “If one of those struggling kids was

your child, wouldn't you want the instructor right beside her to keep her from drowning?" Obviously, by not addressing the concern of the parent, the administrator was putting the mayor in a position of emotionally agreeing as if it was a dichotomous decision: is it worth having one child drown just so another child can learn how to swim? The administrator ended the conversation by, again, ignoring the concern of the father and appealing to his ignorance. She asked him, "Are you a trained swimming instructor?" When he replied that he was a banker, she said that he could not understand all the issues involved and that she would enjoy discussing the matter further . . . when he was a licenced swimming instructor.

The interaction between the mayor and the swimming lesson administrator serve as an example of what a parent may encounter when he or she approaches a teacher or principal with a concern about the parent's child. When a parent brings a concern to an educator, both parties must stay focused on the issue at hand. For productive dialogue to occur, the educator must stay refrain from resorting to fallacious arguments and improper appeals to emotion or ignorance. The parent must also stay focused on his or her concern and not allow the conversation to deviate from the reason for which he or she came to the school. One aspect of confrontation that both the administrator and the father did positively model was the ability to keep the discussion civil and not to succumb to emotional outbursts that will undermine profitable discussion.

Lessons from the Accountant

The accountant served as a reality check for the Provincial Training Group. After the mayors had created lofty goals for the Ranches irrespective of budgetary constraints, it was the accountant who had the responsibility of confronting them to find out how they would pay for the additional training, equipment, and supplies required. The PTG ridiculed the accountant and did their best to sidestep his warnings.

Cassandra. In chapter 8 of *The Foal and the Ranch*, the accountant was introduced for the purpose of revealing the role of Cassandra and the likely consequences of those who take that role upon themselves. In the fable, Grandad and the lawyer raised many philosophical issues, while the accountant exposed financial concerns. As was covered earlier, the mythical Cassandra was blessed with the ability to see the future but subsequently tormented by the curse that no one would heed her predictions. The accountant reprimanded the mayors for irresponsibly making promises for which the PTG was incapable of bankrolling. Although the predictions of the accountant turned out to be accurate (the PTG went broke when they were

forced to try to implement their promises), the mayors scoffed at the accountant and chose to ignore his admonitions.

Willful blindness. Rather than admit to their overzealous intentions, the mayors described the accountant as a “weasel” and openly mocked him. Instead of repentance, the PTG chose willful blindness as they attempted to sidestep the impending doom that the accountant foretold. Using deceiving literary devices, flawed logic, and rhetoric, the mayors were able to temporarily hide the reality of their situation. In the end, however, they were forced to confront their mistakes and the accountant was proved right – the promises of the PTG bankrupt the towns, the mayors lost their jobs, and the Ranches were forced to shut down.

While it is unlikely that the creation of current educational policy included a blatant confrontation, such as the one described in chapter 8 of the fable between the PTG and the accountant, the results are the same. If it is discovered that there is insufficient funding available for schools to realize the potential of each student, policy-makers may try to protect their jobs by hiding the shortcomings of the system. If they choose this course of action, the outcomes will inevitably fail to meet expectations, and the students will continually underachieve. If policy-makers choose to lower the expectations to goals for which they can reasonably afford to implement corresponding programs, short-term pain will result. Lowering promises may cause policy-makers to become unpopular with voters but, in the long-run, student success will likely increase. The question remains, will there be a group of elected officials willing to listen to Cassandra, lift the veil of blindness, and make the necessary changes to education – even if the changes result in personal loss for the policy-makers?

Literary Devices and Paradox

The following examples from *The Foal and the Ranch* exemplify literary devices and paradoxes that are present in today’s educational system.

The confusing road sign. As the foal journeyed into town one day (Chapter 7), he noticed a new sign that read “ABSOLUTELY NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES WITHIN TOWN LIMITS.” This law seemed self-explanatory until, several yards later, there another sign was posted. The second sign was like the first except another line had been added underneath the first: “Particularly vehicles with more than four wheels.” The appearance of the second line caused confusion for the foal.

Upon arriving at his Grandad's, the foal complained about the sign. After settling down, however, the foal apologized for getting so upset about a silly law that made no sense to him. Grandad's response was to reassure the foal that people should get upset if laws are inconsistent because, if they are allowed to persist, one of two things will happen: Either people will live under rules that make no sense or, even worse, people will begin to ignore rules and policies and they will all become meaningless. I believe this is what has happened concerning certain aspects of the educational system.

In Chapter Two, it was shown that the humanities can help educate citizens and inspire informed public debate. When laws and policies are complicated and contradictory, the exact opposite effect ensues and people become complacent. Perhaps the best examples of contradictory statutes that go unchallenged in the educational system are found in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) and the Saskatchewan *Education Act* (1995).

The Charter. Section 15 (1) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) details the equal rights of every citizen. It begins, “*Every* individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination . . .”[emphasis added]. Much like the first sign in the fable, this portion of the *Charter* seems quite self-explanatory. Like the second road sign, however, the next phrase in Section 15 complicates matters and invites discrimination. Section 15(1) continues, “. . . and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” In what may have been an attempt to add clarity to the issue of equality, the second phrase actually welcomes confusion and debate as to whom “every individual” refers.

The confusion can be seen in how the specific characteristics are listed in the *Charter*. Of the seven traits mentioned, the first six are *categories* of characteristics while the seventh is a *sub-category*. For example, a person may not be discriminated against based on race (category) regardless of if they are Aboriginal or Asian (sub-categories). Similarly a person may not be discriminated against based on age (category) regardless of if they are young or old (sub-categories). The final characteristic is different from the rest. If it were consistent, it would read that a person cannot be discriminated against based on mental or physical *abilities* (or *condition*, or *characteristics*, etc.) which are categories. The sub-categories of mental or physical abilities

would be listed under descriptions such as advanced ability or dis-ability. This incongruity in the Canadian *Charter* has allowed for a similar inconsistency in the Saskatchewan *Education Act*.

The Education Act. Like the Section 15 of the Charter, the Saskatchewan *Education Act* (1995) begins quite clearly. Section 142 (1a) states that “*Every person . . . has the right to receive instruction appropriate to that person’s . . . educational achievement*” [emphasis added]. In an apparent effort to emphasise that exceptional students are included under the heading of “Every person,” Section 178 (4) concerning pupils with intensive needs states that “A board of education *shall* provide services consistent with that pupil’s educational needs and abilities” [emphasis added]. Compare Section 142(1a) and 178(4) with Section 187 pertaining to provisions for children who are gifted:

Where the ordinary programs of instruction of the school are considered by the board of education to be insufficient to meet the educational needs of certain pupils of superior natural ability or exceptional talent, the board of education *may* make provision for any special programs that it considers feasible and appropriate [emphasis added].

Although Section 142(1) clearly states that it is the right of *all* children to receive an appropriate education, Sections 178(4) and 187 reveal a contradiction. Children with learning disabilities *shall* receive supports, while gifted students *may* receive help. As Manley-Casimir and Moffat (2012) stated, “When a statutory power or authority is conferred by the use of the word ‘may’ the recipient is given the lawful discretion to exercise the power or not, whereas the use of the word ‘shall’ by the legislature imposes an obligation.” Appropriate education for *typical* (or normal or average) students is provided for under the *Education Act*; Special education for those with learning disabilities is also an obligation for schools; but special education for children who are gifted is optional and left to the discretion of school administrators with limited budgets.

The effect of these inconsistent legal documents is difficult to ascertain. According to Des Rosiers (2012), when people tolerate a difference between what the law says, and what the law does, rule of law is destroyed, and society thus “undermines the legitimacy of many of its institutions” (p. 13). It is possible that some of the complaints and frustrations felt by many Saskatchewan educators and students stem from incongruences within the *Charter* and the *Education Act*. As what happened in *The Foal and the Ranch*, it will likely take a challenge in

the courts to determine if these discriminatory practices are legally allowable. In the meantime, policy-makers, administrators, and educators seem to maintain legal justification for disadvantaging those with higher academic capabilities.

The paradox of creating the purpose without considering the cost. The goals of education cannot be determined in a vacuum. One of the primary considerations when deciding on educational goals is whether or not there are sufficient resources to accomplish the goal. If an organization cannot afford the cost of equipment, personnel, and facilities that are required to achieve the purpose of the organization, it is an indication that fallacious thinking by policy-makers has led to a paradox within the system. If the paradox is not addressed based on the reality of the situation, policy-makers may resort to doublespeak in an effort to cover up the fallacy. The situation described above is exactly what happened in *The Foal and the Ranch*.

In Chapter Two, it was noted that a paradox occurs in “everything for everyone” inclusive educational systems if there are financial constraints and competing priorities (Kalyanpur, 2011, p. 1068). As financial constraints are a real limitation in public schools, any school official who promises to meet the individual needs of each student, is creating a paradox. This paradox is seen in chapter six of the fable as members of the PTG promise to provide educational resources beyond what their budget would allow. This left them in the position of greatly expanding the budget, or lowering the promise of the quality of education that would be provided. After the accountant made it clear that expanding the budget was not an option, the mayors use doublespeak to try to cover the fact that they were going back on their promise to have all foals reach their full potential.

Doublespeak occurs when policy makers realize that a goal they had previously set will be impossible to attain (Dörner, 1996). Rather than admit their error, they attempt to save their reputations by covering the fact that they have created a policy paradox. In the example in the fable, when the accountant pointed out to the PTG that they could not afford to keep the promises they made (chapter eight), the mayors chose not to revert back to their original goal of education (to train foals to be plow horses). Instead, the mayors kept the new purpose of education with the promise that differentiated instruction would provide the resources and instruction necessary for all foals to reach their full potential. Drastically changing the goal of education without any significant adjustment in methods, instruction, or quality of trainers, was a

clear example of doublespeak and, as Dörner predicted would happen, the promises sounded good to the ear, but led to little or no positive results.

The fallacious thinking patterns to which the mayors succumbed provided examples of emotional idealism and wishful thinking. In an ideal situation, trainers would have been adequately prepared to provide differentiated instruction, they would have had all the resources they needed, and class sizes would have been small enough to allow for large quantities of individualized attention. In most classrooms today, these idealistic expectations do not describe reality. In addition, much of what determines academic success (for example, family income, parental education, and student nutrition) is beyond the control of teachers. The ambitious goal of the educational system to have all children reach their full potential is idealistic and a fallacy of wishful thinking.

Paradox of more services for less money. In chapter nine, the old mayor articulated a paradox for which the mayors were all too keenly aware: Citizens want lower taxes along with increased services. As elected officials, the mayors felt pressure to promise their electorate better services at the training Ranches or risk the chances of re-election. The mayors chose to ignore the fact that the new services would cause an increase in taxes until the accountant forced them to confront their willful blindness (see below). In the meantime, the PTG resorted to doublespeak and rhetoric to try to hide the fact that they could not afford to keep their promises.

This story not only revealed a flaw in the elected officials, it also showed the short-sightedness of those responsible for voting. In a democracy, citizens must have realistic expectations of policy-makers who are bound by financial limitations (which are indirectly set by the willingness of the electorate to be taxed). If candidates can only win an election by making promises beyond their financial means, the electorate has created a system in which candidates are forced to lie or to spend beyond their means in order to win an election. For this reason, a long-term solution is needed that is both realistic and affordable. The consequences associated with failing to implement a financially viable system are exposed with the introduction of the accountant to the PTG.

The paradox of the achievement gap. In chapter nine, the old mayor discussed the paradox of the achievement gap if the goal of training was to have all foals reach their full potential. Because foals are differently gifted, with different genetic make-ups, and different

home environments; enabling each foal to reach its full potential will likely increase the achievement gap and owners will complain about inequality.

Similar to those seen at the Ranches, situations pertaining to the achievement gap can be seen in Saskatchewan public schools. Each child has different gifts and talents, each child has a different genetic code and a different background with different experiences, and each child has a different home environment. Some of these traits will be beneficial to learning in school and others will hinder growth. As a result, programs that enable all children to reach their full potential will actually accentuate these differences and cause some children to achieve much higher than others. Even if factors such as culture, language, and socioeconomic status are accounted for, differences in intellectual abilities and motivation will still create an achievement gap between children. The achievement gap in a system which seeks the attainment of individual potential becomes problematic when overarching organizations such as the UNESCO and the OECD value equal outcomes more than they do maximizing individual achievement.

The paradox of the Kaimanawa foals. A book about educational issues in Saskatchewan would not be complete without addressing Aboriginal education in the Province. As with many of the issues raised in the fable, the story of the Kaimanawa horses is designed to introduce a topic for discussion, not to solve the problem. In chapter 10 of *The Foal and the Ranch*, Grandad tells the story of how the town was settled and the Ranch built while the roaming owners of the Kaimanawa horses were in a different location following their migrating game. Upon their return, it was agreed that in exchange for the use of the land, the owners of the Kaimanawa horses could send their foals to the Ranch for training free of charge. For several reasons, this arrangement failed to produce satisfactory results.

The first problem was that the desired outcome for the owners of the Kaimanawa was for their foals to be sleek endurance horses, capable of surviving in the wild, and good at working together. The Ranches trained them to be bulky, strong, individualistic horses that ate out of a trough. This created one of two possible outcomes, neither of which was desirable. In most cases, the Kaimanawa foals were frustrated by the confining nature of Ranches and plow machines and they failed to meet the strength requirements of the other foals their age. Also, the food from the trough made the Kaimanawa foals sick. Before their training was complete, many of the Kaimanawa foals ran away from the Ranch and returned to living in the wild. Conversely, a few Kaimanawa foals that were large and strong excelled at the Ranch and became first-rate

plow horses. Unfortunately, the roaming Kaimanawa owners had no use for plow horses, and these foals with their large appetites and low stamina became liabilities to their owners. Obviously neither outcome was beneficial for the owners of the Kaimanawa foals.

As a result, this led to the Kaimanawa owners insisting that the PTG train the Kaimanawa foals in a more traditional manner. The PTG built many small Ranches along the migration route and equipped the Ranches with old equipment and new trainers. As it was all the PTG new how to do, the Ranches continued to train the Kaimanawa foals to become plow horses. With out-dated equipment and inexperienced trainers, these new Ranches failed and the owners of the Kaimanawa were more frustrated than ever.

This story illustrates some of the paradox of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan. Based on Treaties, First Nation's People have a right to education. As indicated by high dropout rates, high failure rates, and high rates of diagnoses with learning disabilities, many Aboriginal children are suffering in Provincial public schools. This failure consequently points to the inadequacy of differentiated instruction in the classroom. If differentiated instruction were adequate, the needs of Aboriginal students would be met in the regular classroom: an outcome that is obviously not the case.

First Nation's leaders point to the Saskatchewan Government and claim that the Crown has not held up its end of the Treaty: to provide education to First Nation Children. Understandably, they want traditional Aboriginal education for their children – a service for which Euro-Canadians are unqualified to provide. This situation has created a paradox where the Crown has promised to provide education to Aboriginal children, but the only education the government is qualified to provide is not desirable for First Nation's People. The more the system fails, the more Aboriginal people call upon the government for education, and the vicious cycle continues.

While attempting to solve the issue of Aboriginal education in the Province is beyond the scope of this dissertation, there is a foundational issue that must be considered by policy-makers. It is the basic question, *what is the purpose of schools?* As it is right now, the purpose of Saskatchewan schools is to have all children reach their full potential. As such, any child – First Nation's or otherwise – can reasonably expect the school system to support them in the endeavour to attain their potential. As much as one child must be supported in learning to become a writer, athlete, or physicist; another child must be supported in becoming a hunter,

trapper, or fisherman. This expectation (and obligation on the schools) would change if the purpose of education was amended. Until then, however, Aboriginal education is an example of the inadequacy of the school system to have all children reach their full potential using methods of differentiated instruction.

The paradox of the Morab foals. Like the chronicle of the Kaimanawa horses, the account of the Morab foals revealed the failure of Ranches to recognize the abilities of a breed that was different from those on which the Ranch was designed to serve. Because they were bred for lifting not pulling, the Morab foals were strong but not in the areas tested by the Ranch trainers. Because of this difference, many Morab foals were required to spend extra years in training to adjust to the methods and testing criteria of the Ranches.

The illustration of the Morab foals represents the plight of non-English speaking children who enter Saskatchewan schools. Although they may have above average intellectual abilities, many English Language Learners (ELLs) are designated as learning disabled due to language difficulties. Understanding that Canada is a multi-cultural nation, and Saskatchewan schools have a policy of inclusive classrooms, it is unreasonable to expect a teacher with twenty or more students to meet the needs of each individual ELL student in his or her class. Further, it is highly dubious to assume that same teacher will meet the needs of each individual ELL student while simultaneously having every other child reach his or her potential as well. When we create unworkable educational policies in an attempt to reach educational goals that are impossible to meet, it is not surprising that the system is failing and people are frustrated. For the sake of all children, educational stakeholders need to realistically discuss attainable (and affordable) goals, and the methods that are required to achieve those goals.

Critical Examination of Language

Before there can be meaningful dialogue about educational issues, certain language issues must be addressed. This section discusses the importance of defining relevant terms, including the problematic nature of defining *potential*.

Defining terms. In chapter two of *The Foal and the Ranch*, Grandad recounted his traumatic experience as a foal when he mistakenly thought that a stall was a stable. Thinking the foal was just being stubborn, the trainer beat Grandad because he refused to obey the trainer and get into the stall. This story illustrates the importance of understanding the definition of basic words. Before meaningful dialogue about educational issues can occur, stakeholders must agree

on the definition of key terms. As was shown earlier in this dissertation, foundational words such as *educate*, *teach*, and *accountability* can have complex meanings that can cause misunderstandings and confusion if they are not clarified.

Educate, teach, and accountability. As an example of how different definitions for the same word can impact the application of policy, I will return to the words *educate*, *teach*, and *accountability*. As was shown in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the word *educate* can mean *to bring out* or *to put in*. This led to the question, *does education occur when information is taught or when information is learned?* With this question in mind, reconsider Ministry (2013) policy: that educational freedom “does not include the right not to educate one’s children” (p. 91). If education (teaching) occurs when information is taught, then educators (whether home-based or school-based) are simply responsible for providing students with information. An educator that gives lectures, hands out textbooks, or provides students with a computer with internet access, has likely fulfilled the educational requirement. But does this limited definition of *educate* represent the spirit of the philosophy of education in Saskatchewan? Further investigation indicates that this level of accountability may be sufficient in the legal and medical professions, but not in the field of education.

Because the Ministry has chosen to use student achievement outcomes in specific areas (such as reading, math, and science) to measure education, it becomes clear that they consider education to be both a putting in (specific information) and a drawing out (that same information). A teacher was not successful, and education did not occur, unless a student can prove that he or she has learned something. The implications of this higher accountability of educators are immense. Based on Ministry (2012b) policy, a teacher is accountable for “improving student achievement” (n.p.). And justly applying the consequences of home-based educators to public schools would suggest that if a student does not show that learning has occurred, the teacher (and perhaps the school) would lose the opportunity to oversee the education of the child. To grasp the magnitude of holding teachers accountable for student outcomes, it helps to consider the application of a similar policy in other fields.

Instead of criteria such as quality of instruction, content knowledge, or the ability to connect with children, the Ministry has chosen to measure teacher effectiveness based on a particular range of student outcomes. I will make two analogies that apply similar policies to the legal and medical professions.

A defense lawyer is ultimately judged on such things as his or her application of the law, research capabilities, and argumentative prowess; a defense lawyer is not judged on whether or not the client was found not guilty. The underlying logic behind these standards is simple; there are often extenuating circumstances for which the lawyer may not be reasonably expected to overcome (for example, the client may have been guilty of the crime or refused to provide helpful evidence). The lawyer is only held accountable for his or her own actions, not for the actions of others.

Likewise, in the medical profession, a doctor is expected to accurately diagnose a patient and to prescribe appropriate treatment. The doctor is held accountable for his or her own diagnosis and advised treatment plan, not explicitly on whether or not the patient's health improves. While successful outcomes are obviously preferable in both cases, the professional person is held accountable for his or her own actions, not the actions or outcomes of the client.

Educational policy is tantamount to judging the competence of a defense lawyer on the sole outcome of if his or her client was acquitted. This judgement of lawyer competence would apply regardless of if the client was guilty of the crime or if the client ignored the legal counsel he or she was provided. Similarly, if educational policy was applied in medicine, a doctor would be responsible for the healing of a patient – even if the patient chose to ignore the advice of the doctor, came for help too late, did not show up for appointments, or did not take the prescribed medication. The implied definition of “educate” and “teach” means that teachers are held to a much higher standard of care (successful outcomes) than other professionals. These definitions create a problematic situation with accountability also, because much of what may hinder successful student outcomes is beyond the control of teachers and schools.

Potential. In chapter seven of the fable, the lawyer and his wife had a discussion about the problematic nature of identifying individual potential as the goal of education. The lawyer's first concern was how individual potential would be identified. As I have never found an educational policy that attempts to answer how a child's potential will be discovered, the lawyer is only told that trainers will be taught this skill at an undetermined later date. As with Saskatchewan teachers, the promised training never occurs.

Related to the issue of identifying potential is the difficulty educators would have in measuring potential as well as quantifying a student's relative progress toward reaching their potential. In the fable, there is no indication that the PTG or any of the Ranches have an

instrument for measuring the ultimate potential or progress of a foal. The non-existence of measurement tools available to trainers is representative of the fact that in Saskatchewan, neither the Ministry nor any of the schools have procedure for measuring potential. With no formula by which potential can be identified or measured, the goal of all children reaching their full potential is fallaciously idealistic and wishful thinking . . . but problematic to disprove.

Fixed potential. The next concern about potential that the lawyer expresses to his wife is the underlying assumption that potential is fixed. In the fable, the lawyer assumes that the potential of a one year old foal was accurately identified and measured. Following this assessment, however, the lawyer hypothesizes several scenarios that would alter a foal's potential. If the foal sustained an injury or was sold to another owner, surely its potential would be impacted. Measuring potential, therefore, would have to be an ongoing process that would require the trainers to know the ongoing changes in every aspect of the life of each foal, and how those changes would impact individual potential. Similarly, it is idealistic to think that a child's potential can be measured when he or she enters school at five years of age. It is even more unrealistic to think that a teacher can continually monitor the individual circumstances of the 30 to 150 students in the teacher's care, and adjust the potential of each child accordingly. Surely changing conditions will positively or negatively affect the outcomes of the future. School policies that assume potential is fixed, and/or offer no instrument for measurement of student potential, are pure rhetoric.

Competing potentials. In discussion with his wife, the lawyer also addresses the reality that a foal may have two or more competing potentials that are mutually exclusive. The example given in the fable is of a foal who had the potential to become a large, strong plow horse, or else a sleek, fast race horse. Because of the different physical qualities and training procedures necessary for each discipline, the horse could become one or the other, but not both. Like school policies, the Ranches did not account for this dichotomy that created a training paradox. Schools attempt to conceal this paradox by using goal inversion and the broken window fallacy. They will point out individual achievement in one area without acknowledging the lack of development in other areas. The results that would occur if a school ever did attempt to have a child reach their full potential in all areas was illustrated in chapter 14 of the fable.

In chapter 14 of *The Foal and the Ranch*, the Provincial Training Group was forced to attempt to implement the programs necessary to enable all foals to reach their potential. The first

shortcoming of this strategy was that there are countless disciplines for which a foal could be trained, and no single Ranch could accommodate them all. Second, because there was no consideration for competing potentials, the best interests of the foals were ignored as trainers from each of the multiple disciplines attempted to have every foal reach its potential in every discipline the Ranch offered. As a result of this over-training and incompatible training and dietary requirements, foals became exhausted, they were often sick, and none reached their potential in any discipline. This logical consequence points to the need for policy-makers to choose between competing potentials and introduces yet another aspect of potential that must be considered: value judgements. Policy-makers must determine which potentials are to be awarded higher priority.

Value judgements. As will be shown, a blanket promise to support all individuals in the attainment of their potentials is, at best, negligent, and, at worst, sadistic. This limitless policy means that school teachers must equip their students to efficiently perform even those acts which society deems to be undesirable. One may argue that common sense prevents teachers from instructing on the best practices for criminal activities, but these limitations are based on value judgements which are not specified in current policy. Educational policies that do not stipulate those potentials which are to be pursued and those that are to be curtailed leave the educational system compelled to teach *all* potentials without preference. Further, the value of many skills can only be judged once the motive of the one taking action is known. The difficulty in determining whether or not a potential skill is morally praiseworthy was illustrated in the fable.

As the lawyer went over his concerns with his wife, he recounted the story of how a weaker foal had been bullied and kicked while attending Ranch several years before. Under previous Ranch policy, the trainer had been reprimanded for teaching the bully how to kick effectively. Under the new policy of having all foals reach their potential, however, trainers were expected to teach each foal how to kick to the best of its ability. The lawyer's wife argued that teaching foals to kick was a shameful act and that no foal should be taught any skill that can be used to hurt another foal. Her value judgement was countered by the lawyer, as he pointed out that horses sometimes assist firefighters by kicking down locked doors; and so, in that case, kicking is a valuable skill that can save lives of people. Because a trainer cannot foresee the future employment of a young foal, it is impossible for him or her to provide an accurate value judgement on many activities. Even if a trainer could know that a specific foal would use a

certain skill for negative purposes, the open-ended promise to have all foals reach their full potential would obligate the trainer to still equip the foal to the best of his or her ability.

Similarly, public school policy-makers who have the intention of having all children reach their full potential seem by their policies to ignore the fact that not all potentials are desirable. By not clearly stating which potentials are desirable and which are not, they are implicitly asking educators to make impossible value judgements. An example of a situation that may occur in a school setting can be seen in the following example: Explosives are used to demolish unsafe buildings that may cause harm to residents. Explosives are also used to blow up buildings with the intent of killing or injuring people. Knowing these facts, a grade 11 chemistry teacher has three choices when considering instruction: the teacher can follow Ministry guidelines and attempt to have all children reach their full potential as bomb makers. This compliant teacher would be choosing to live with the risk that one or more of the students may become a highly effective terrorist. Second, the teacher can make his or her own value judgement on the danger of explosives and refuse to teach students how to make bombs. This would violate the purpose of having all children reach their full potential. Or third, the teacher can attempt to determine which students in his or her class are morally able to handle such knowledge and which other ones are not as trustworthy. Beyond being unreasonable, this too, is a value judgement and violates the policy of having *all* children reach their full potential. Ultimately, this leaves teachers to set aside all value judgements and teach all things to the best of their abilities regardless of the morality of the skill being taught or the potential damage a student may cause with the knowledge.

It is difficult to imagine a skill that could not have at least one positive and one negative application, therefore, a binary of labeling a potential as unilaterally good or bad is nearly impossible. This would indicate that school policies that propose to have all children reach their full potential are ignoring value judgements and obligating themselves to teach every possible skill to every child. The moral and financial implications of this mandate are harsh and somewhat implausible. Short of providing everything to everyone, educators would be required to make a judgement on the value of the skill being taught (is it morally praiseworthy?), or on the person being instructed (is he or she morally responsible to only use this skill for positive purposes?). Policies that use potential as a benchmark, but fail to qualify these statements by outlining to which potentials these policies speak, are incomplete, impractical, and unworkable.

Identifying Fallacies and Flawed Logic

Beyond the language issues outlined above, *The Foal and the Ranch* included many fallacies that can be found in the educational system. Examples of some of the fallacies represented in the fable are examined below.

The all/some fallacy. As it is in the Saskatchewan educational system, the all/some fallacy (using the word *all* rather than the word *some*) is prevalent throughout *The Foal and the Ranch*. In chapter six of the fable, the Provincial Training Group members attempted to create a purpose of education that would be satisfactory to those living in the region. The creation of the goal to enable ALL foals to reach their full potential was so lofty and so honourable, that no one could argue its virtue. Similarly, the purpose of schools in Saskatchewan is both admirable and unattainable. Common sense dictates that no mass system with standardized curriculum and severely limited funding could enable *all* students to reach their full potential. Because it only takes one exception to prove it false, exposing the all/some fallacy is often easy to accomplish. In the case of an immeasurable metric such as potential, however, the lawyer found that proving that a foal did not reach its potential could be problematic.

The all/some fallacy could also be turned to work against policy-makers who use potential as a standard. As an example from *The Foal and the Ranch*, if it were asserted that all of the foals *failed* to meet their potential, the Provincial Training Group would only have to prove that one foal did reach his or her potential, and the accusation would be proven false. The PTG would encounter the same problem as the lawyer: how do they prove that a foal had reached his or her potential? With no known measuring tool as well as the additional complications of determining potential mentioned above, proving attainment of potential would be as problematic as proving potential was not reached. This topic will be explored further under the heading *burden of proof*.

Correlation proves causation and the fallacy of the single cause. The mistake of ignoring the fact that outside factors can impact student learning as much or more than the influence of a teacher is further represented in chapter four of the fable. Initially, the PTG assumed that poor training results at Ranch 4 were a result of an incompetent instructor. The mayors succumbed to the fallacy of *cum hoc ergo propter hoc*: correlation proves causation. Upon further investigation, however, it was discovered that Ranch 4 had significantly less resources available for training and perhaps even more revealing, the foals that had been

removed from the Ranch due to poor performance were those who belonged to the poorest owners. This example also demonstrates the fallacy of the single cause.

Children perform poorly in schools for a multitude of reasons. Critics may point to certain correlations and suggest that there was causation when, in reality, this may not be the case. For example, a school may be accused of having an incompetent teaching staff because student achievement in that school is well below the provincial average. Poor student achievement may be correlated with the teachers in that school, but causation – and certainly not single causation – may not have been demonstrated. The teachers may have had access to fewer resources or perhaps class sizes were much larger than other classes in the province. Beyond the school factors, the students may come from poorer socio-economic environments where nutrition and academic help is more difficult to obtain. Additionally, children may have to work part-time to help support their families and so school absenteeism becomes a factor. These are just a few factors that may influence student achievement, and failure to consider all of them when examining student performance exemplifies the fallacy of the single cause.

Paying for the promise. Although the necessity to recognize limited resources has been touched upon already in the deconstruction of the fable, it bears repeating under a heading of its own. A policy-maker who does not take into account the amount of funding available for a specific endeavour is suspect of creating a paradox. Correspondingly, a policy that does not have sufficient funding for complete implementation is inoperable for those who must endure under it. Proceeding, as the mayors attempted to do in chapter nine of the fable, with a goal that would require resources beyond their means indicates fallacious thinking. While this type of fallacious thinking causes frustration and confusion in the specific areas in which it manifests, it also undermines the educational system as a whole. The real-life frustration this paradox causes can be seen in the comments made by the teacher candidates that are found in Chapter Five.

Argumentum ad hominem. In chapter 12 of the fable, one of the mayors resorted to *Argumentum ad Hominem* (argument against the man) when he discovered that the lawyer was going to pursue legal action against the Provincial Training Group. Rather than addressing the concerns of the lawyer, the mayor called the lawyer a hothead and pointed out that, “he is not from around here.” Obviously threatened, the mayor substituted a logical response with a personal insult. In *The Foal and the Ranch*, this fallacious argument was largely ignored as the

situation had already escalated to legal action, but arguments against the man can often distract conversations away from the relevant issues at hand.

Appeal to popular opinion. In chapter seven of the fable, there was an example of the appeal to popular opinion, but how this fallacious argument was presented had a twist. As was shown earlier, this appeal assumes that because a thought or action is generally accepted, it is correct. In the fable, however, the lawyer's wife just assumed that she knew what everyone thought and convinced herself that popular opinion was in favour of the Ranches. She said,

The only reason I am going along with [sending my foal to the Ranch] is because almost every owner I know is sending their foals to the Ranch. So, if the other owners are confident that the Ranches will do a good job I guess I will just have to trust that the PTG [will do a good job]. (p. 148)

As can be seen, no one presented the argument to the wife that she should send her foal to the Ranch because everyone else was doing it, yet she felt pressure to conform to societal norms anyway. Many people may feel obliged to conform to expectations or not even consider going against the customs, conventions, and institutions that are in place. In our society, this logic can create a non sequitur as well. Because the government has mandated what children must be taught, the fact that most children attend public school says little about society's belief in the effectiveness of schools and more about the law-abiding nature of its citizens. Whether one chooses to send their children to school because it is expected or sends them because it is the law, they are doing it because of outside forces, not on the value or merit of school itself.

False dichotomy. The false dichotomy frames an argument in such a way as to suggest that there are only two conceivable alternatives. In chapter six, a mayor who did not support the No Foals Left Behind Program in the South was accused of wanting some foals left behind. This is a false dichotomy because not supporting a particular program or its methods does not necessarily mean that one does not support the purpose or intent of the program. Additionally, one may support a purpose in theory, but believe that it is not viable to achieve and, therefore, oppose it. For example, this situation might occur in Saskatchewan if someone were to oppose the purpose of having all children reach their full potential because they felt it was impractical to achieve. The person opposing the purpose may want all children to reach their full potential, but not believe that it is an attainable goal for public schools and should therefore be modified.

Claiming that this person does not want all children to reach their full potential displays a false dichotomy.

Burden of proof. The *onus probandi* (burden of proof) argument was employed by the old mayor in chapter nine of the fable as he discussed the purpose of having all foals reach their potential. He argued that it would be impossible to prove that a specific foal did not reach its potential so no one could validate the PTG's claims that each foal had reached their potential. As anyone who might challenge the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's record of success would find out quickly, this fallacious argument can be problematic as our justice system is based on a premise of innocent until proven guilty. The Province would not have to prove a child reached his or her potential, the accuser would have to prove that the child did not. This makes nebulous terms such as *potential* a difficult obstacle for educational reformers to overcome.

Thought-terminating cliché. In order to pacify owners who questioned the ability of Ranches to have all foals reach their full potential, in chapter nine of the fable the Provincial Training Group ordered trainers to "push the idea of inclusive classrooms and differentiated instruction." The purpose of presenting the rhetoric of differentiated instruction was to introduce a thought-terminating cliché. The owners were placated with the notion that their foals would be given whatever accommodations were necessary to endure that each one reached its potential. As the lawyer discovered with his gifted foal, however, policies and practices are not always aligned.

The Saskatchewan educational system may espouse a policy of differentiated instruction whereby the individual needs of all students are met, but due to insufficient resources, large class sizes, undertrained teachers, and widely heterogeneous classrooms, differentiated instruction is a simply a cliché designed to end discussion, not educate children.

The broken window argument. The broken window argument focuses attention on benefits of a particular policy or action but disregards lost opportunity costs. In other words, when defending a specific policy, proponents focus on the benefits and ignore the associated costs. This fallacy was illustrated in two separate incidents within the fable. The first was the swimming lesson administrator who told the parent that his child was benefitting from being in a heterogeneous classroom because she was learning to help weaker swimmers. However, the

administrator did not address the strokes that the student did not learn because she was pre-occupied with helping the teacher instruct the weaker swimmers.

The second example of the broken window fallacy occurred in chapter 10 as the head trainer explained to the lawyer why the lawyer's foal had been left in the pasture unsupervised for six hours. The head trainer said that "learning to get along with other horses is part of maturing" and "extended unsupervised time is actually vital to their development." Again, the head trainer did not mention the lost instruction that the lawyer's foal miss out on, nor did he have an answer as to why the other foals were not given the same opportunity to develop this ability.

These examples of using the broken window argument are prevalent in discussions surrounding gifted children in heterogeneous classrooms. Students who complete their work ahead of their peers are regularly called upon to assist those who are struggling. Teachers and administrators may argue that helping other students actually aids the learning process of the student who is teaching. Unmentioned is the learning lost to the gifted student because his or her time is taken assisting other students. Additionally, if helping struggling students is beneficial for the student providing the assistance, teachers should be regularly assigning all students opportunities to help those who are behind them academically (perhaps in a lower grade). As the practice of having all students become teachers is not a regular occurrence, it is fallacious to fail to mention the opportunity costs that are being suffered by gifted students who are recruited to provide teaching duties.

Appeal to tradition and a red herring. In chapter 10 of the fable, an interesting exchange occurred between the lawyer and one of the trainers. As the lawyer looked over the training facilities, he implied that the plow machines were insufficient because they were the same machines that the sire of the owner's colt had used years earlier. This was a fallacious appeal to tradition as the owner did not address why the machines were now deficient but surmised that just because of their age, they were now inadequate.

Perhaps feeling that he could not properly address the underlying concerns of the lawyer (that the plow machines were inadequate), the trainer countered with a red herring response. As if there was relevance to the usefulness of the machines, the trainer pointed out that the plow machines looked much better than they had in the past because they had recently been painted.

This conversation illustrates how even though discussion took place, flawed logic by both parties prevented any meaningful exchange from occurring.

The fallacy of determination. Beyond the burden of proof fallacy that was discussed earlier, the mayors' response to the owners who felt their foals had not reached their potential also illustrated the fallacy of determination. Gula (2006) described the fallacy of determination by saying that, "If something that you would like to happen hasn't happened yet, the reason that it hasn't happened is that you haven't wanted it to happen strongly enough" (p. 136). The Provincial Training Group could argue that their promise (found in chapter six of the fable) was to *enable* all foals to reach their potential; it was not a guarantee of success. If an owner felt that his or her foal failed to reach their potential, the PTG could argue that it was a result of a lack of effort on the part of the foal. Although the word *enable* is not as prevalent in Ministry policies, educators in the provinces could invoke the same logic when challenged by parents who feel that their children did not meet their potential. School staff could argue that if potential was not reached, it was the fault of the student, not the school. This argument comes full circle as the question then becomes when does teaching occur: when information is made available to students or when a student actually learns? In this argument, the school staff would be arguing the former, while Ministry accountability statements resting on student outcomes indicate the latter.

How Homeschooling Policies Impacted the Ranches

Near the conclusion of *The Foal and the Ranch*, in chapter 14 the Ranches were forced to measure up to the standards that they had put in place for owners who chose to train their foals at home. Out of fear of "diluting the gene pool" with untrained horses, the PTG had earlier lobbied to the government to implement home-training standards. It was therefore decried that the state was compelled to ensure the training of all foals, regardless of where or how they were trained. Additionally, for the sake of justice and fairness, the obligatory standards must apply equally to all foals. Once these standards were applied to the Ranches, however, the dismal achievement of many foals was revealed. Because so many foals failed to reach the set outcomes, and because foal outcomes indicated insufficient adjustments by trainers, the Ranches were forced to close their doors.

The abolishment of training Ranches in *The Foal and the Ranch* was not representative of a past instance in real life. Instead, it was intended to be a thought-provoking scenario of what

could happen if the standards created for home-based educators were to be applied to public schools. In order to remain open, all students would have to reach curriculum outcomes, all students would have to be making reasonable progress, and all students would have to be provided with instruction appropriate to their achievement level and abilities. In short, all students would have to meet the educational outcomes written in school policies: they would have to be reaching their full potential. By these criteria, it could be that certain underperforming public schools would quickly fall under severe scrutiny and might be in danger of being shut down.

One possible argument against this scenario is the contention that the Ministry guidelines on home-based educators, while strict, are rarely enforced. Therefore, they should not be imposed on public schools either. This argument reveals at least two imperfections in the system. The first inconsistency is the possibility that the Ministry, in spite of statements to the contrary, must not feel that it is a compelling interest of the state to ensure that all students are adequately educated; otherwise it would be more diligent in its monitoring. If this is the case, laws that make schooling compulsory should be eliminated. The second flaw is explained by revisiting how fallacious thinking damages the rule of law and the democratic process. When there is a difference between what a law says and what the law does, it “undermines the legitimacy of many [public] institutions” (Des Rosiers, p. 13). When the law says that the government will ensure all children are being educated, but then fails to do so, it undermines the legitimacy of the school system. Whatever the outcome of schools may be, if educational laws are to be just, fair, and equitable; they must be equally applied to *all* students, to *all* educators, and to *all* educational settings.

Summary of Part II

In Part II of Chapter Four, I deconstructed *The Foal and the Ranch* using the literary toolkit provided in Chapter Two. Beginning with an exploration of three of the major stories in the fable, I explained how these examples were representative of current policies and practices, and how each one contained fallacious thinking and/or paradoxes. Next, I provided an extensive list of literary devices and paradoxes exemplified in the fable, critically examined language utilized in the story, and identified fallacious arguments and flawed logic that were displayed throughout *The Foal and the Ranch*. The culmination of the unsound logic displayed throughout

the fable led to the application of home-education policy and, ultimately, to the demise of the Ranches discussed in *The Foal and the Ranch*.

Chapter 4 Summary

The evidence in Chapter Four served to substantiate that the incidents in *The Foal and the Ranch* are based on actual educational policies and representative of real-life situations. Using giftedness as an example, it was shown that in spite of current policies espousing that the Saskatchewan Educational System will enable all students to reach their full potential; this has not been the case. Part I concluded by examining justice and equity in schools and how the system as it is currently defined may be considered unjust. Part II explored how some of the paradoxes and fallacies described in Chapter Two were represented in *The Foal and the Ranch*. Further, this chapter used the toolkit provided in Chapter Two to unpack examples of fallacious thinking and contentious language issues found in the fable. The ultimate goal beyond this dissertation is for schools to avoid the dire consequences experienced by the Ranches in the fable and make improvements in the educational system. With the real-life foundation of the fable established, I will now explore the responses of educational stakeholders as they read and discussed *The Foal and the Ranch* and determine if they felt personal transformation of understanding had occurred as well as to what extent meaningful dialogue transpired.

Chapter 5: Exploration of Participant and Group Responses to Fable

The purpose of this chapter is to characterize the findings from exposure of each of the three fable-focused discussion groups. Group “A” was comprised of three teacher candidates, group “B” was made up of five experienced educators, and group “C” consisted of three parents. In addition, this chapter will explore each group’s perceptions of how they were impacted by reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. The views of each of three groups will be examined as will the self-perceptions of each participant’s personal transformation. At the conclusion of this chapter, each group will be described with respect to their cognitive and affective learning and group results will be compared.

Discussion Group “A” (Teacher Candidate Group)

Discussion Group “A” consisted of three participants who were part of an undergraduate class in the College of Education. Several months prior to the discussion, as part of their course requirements, the participants had read *The Foal and the Ranch* and it was a topic of discussion in their class. All three participants were female, elementary school teacher candidates, and had previously been educational assistants (EAs). The three participants ranged in age from early 20s to approximately mid-40s. One participant had no children, one had a child in elementary school, and the other had children who were in high school. One of the participants was also married to a teacher. This discussion took place over lunch hour at the University of Saskatchewan while the participants were between classes. Although they undoubtedly had lots on their minds as the semester was concluding, all three were immediately engaged, and discussion flowed continually from start to finish.

Exploring the Discussion

The discussion was begun with an open invitation for the participants to talk about anything they wished that pertained to *The Foal and the Ranch*. Even though the participants had read the book several months prior to the discussion, what stood out immediately was how engaged the participants were, and how readily they recalled events in the book. All three participants were eager to discuss both the content and usage of the fable. The first person who spoke said that she believed that discussion after reading the fable was very important. All three participants agreed because they had noticed through class discussions the different people took different things from the events in the story.

Perspectives on the green dress. Interestingly, all three cited the same example from the fable as being their favourite, yet they all had a somewhat different take on what the point of the story was. The story of the green dress (which one participant accurately described when I asked her to recount it) was initially put into the fable as an example of how outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions (a phrase all three recalled verbatim). In spite of the story being intended to serve as an example of the unstoppable consequences that rise from decisions, only one of the three participants said that this was how they viewed the story. The second participant said that she felt that it was an example of how “one size does not fit all.” She thought that it was a commentary on how the educational system is designed for one type of student and if the student learns in a different way, teachers do not adjust and the student suffers. The final participant saw it somewhat similarly, but as a seamstress she felt that the woman should go home and make a dress that fit. She felt that this was analogous to a parent who chooses to homeschool their child because the school does not meet the child’s needs [Some participants in discussion group “B” found the green dress story to be extremely offensive due to gender stereotyping and felt strongly that the story should be removed from future editions of the fable]. The varied responses to the story of the green dress was a shining example of how participants bring their own experiences with them as they interact with literature and each other.

Frustration amongst participants. The word I believe best describes group “A” throughout their discussion was *frustrated*. The frustration in these teacher candidates manifested primarily in three categories: ignorance, disconnects, and challenges within the educational system.

Ignorance among stakeholders. Strwn through the comments made by group “A” participants was an emerging pattern of frustration about the ignorance of various educational stakeholders. Participants felt that parents were ill-informed, policy makers were naïve, students lacked perspective, and teachers were under-trained.

Ill-informed parents. When describing her perspective of the fable, one participant said “I looked at the book as awareness for parents because I think parents focus on their own kids not the needs of others.” When discussing the achievement level of students, another participant offered, “Most students are not at grade level, I think this would shock most parents.” Participants also felt that parents were not aware that most school policies were mandated by the government and not teacher decisions (for example, starting school after Labour Day or adding

fifteen minutes to each school day). The participant identified as A2 (from group “A,” participant number two) believed that the fable would be helpful in addressing some of these parental issues. She said, “Parents are very misinformed and they don’t even have the right information to come to you because they are so misinformed on what is going on in education today.” Using the fable to combat ignorance went beyond enlightening parents; it also included informing policy makers, students, and themselves.

Naïve policy makers. Participants in group “A” felt the policymakers were often ignorant of how events actually played out in the classroom. One participant said, “I think the ones making the policies need to be on the ground level and actually see what it is like, because I don’t think they . . .” Jumping in, another participant finished her sentence: “I think there’d be a very different view of how things are happening.” The three participants joked that instead of *take your daughter to work* day, there should be a *take your politician to class* day. One participant added, “[Brought] into a real classroom, not the class that ‘oh, the guest is coming so we will be extra good.’ This is what it is like, day-to-day. So they can actually have an idea.” As can be seen in the following exchange, there was some dispute as to whether policymakers were ignorant or were choosing (or felt forced to) ignore some of the issues presented in the fable:

“I think policymakers will be very defensive of the issues presented in this fable. I think they are trying to accommodate a lot of voices.”

“I would hope it would open their eyes a little bit, too. To maybe things that are not . . .”

“I think they are aware of it. I think they are just turning a blind eye to lots of the different things because they would have to throw money resources to things to fix them – this is not something they’re willing to do.”

Besides policy-makers, group “A” participants also felt that there would be great benefit if high school students were to read *The Foal and the Ranch*.

Limited student perspectives. The teacher candidates also believed that the book would help remedy student ignorance. All three agreed that it would be profitable to have high school students read the fable in hopes that they would gain greater perspective on the educational system and the role of teachers. One participant said, “I think you would give them much more of an understanding, or more empathy toward teachers who are trying. But there is so much to juggle.” Another participant added, “High school students are very aware. This particular generation is not shy to voice. . . . And their voices are welcome.”

Under-trained teachers. The final group that participants felt were sometimes ignorant was themselves. As one participants put it:

[Teachers] often get thrown into situations where they are not comfortable with what they're doing, and feel like they are drowning because they can't get themselves to the surface. They are put into positions where they are not comfortable; they are not experts; they are not in a place for they can thrive. I think a lot of teachers in today's education system are drowning in it.

One participant acknowledged that until she had to write in educational fable (as a class assignment) she did not realize how much research was behind *The Foal and the Ranch* and similarly, how little she actually knew about the topic she wanted to write about. They all concurred that exposure to materials such as *The Foal and the Ranch* would help mitigate ignorance among all educational stakeholders.

Disconnect. Perhaps it is not surprising that within a frustrated group such group "A," participants felt helpless to change their plight. Many of their comments required the use of versus coding to represent how teacher candidates felt about the disconnect between Ministry policies and school practices. As was noted by Saldana (2009), versus coding is revealing when there is "an asymmetrical power balance" between parties (p. 94). Listed below are several versus codes with an example of how participants viewed the asymmetrical power balance and disconnect between two parties.

Teachers versus policymakers: One participant articulated the struggle she felt between teachers and those in charge of policy:

I think until we are on the same page with the government who's going to support all the goals that they are giving us, we are far-fetched in what is going to happen. . . . We don't have the resources in place for us to learn about all the different things we can do, and so you are thrown in there.

Teacher candidates had a strong feeling that those who set Provincial policies are not in tune with the realities of the classroom. This lack of awareness caused frustration for teachers and led to friction between teachers and parents.

Parents versus teachers: Teacher candidates found that parents have been given the expectation that schools will enable their children to reach their full potential. One participant commented,

When you look at the full potential, it sounds really good, but how is that going to look in the classroom? I think there is a little bit of a disconnect. . . . If teachers just give parents lines from the policy, parents will lose trust.

These teacher candidates felt that when they are confronted by parents, teachers have to make excuses about lack of time and/or resources which, in effect, undermine the promises of policies; or else teachers simply resort to quoting policies in hopes that parents are unaware of how incongruent policies and practices have become.

Policy versus practice: An example of the disconnect between policy and practice was evident in the following statement made by one of the teacher candidates:

I find it funny when I see government ads promoting physical fitness meanwhile there is no equipment or budget for PE and time being taken from recess and PE even while the school day is being lengthened. In our school we only have three beanbags! It is ridiculous.

These types of disconnects between policies and practices created a cycle of frustration with teachers and with parents. Group “C” (parents) referred to the frustrations they felt when they were told one thing (by teachers or administrators) and witnessed another. Both the teacher candidates and the parents seemed to suggest that it was not so much the practice itself that they had issues with, it was the mixed messages and incongruities that they found confusing and often infuriating.

Teachers versus educational assistants: As former educational assistants, the group was sympathetic towards EAs, and they acknowledged that there is often tension between teachers and EAs. One participant observed, “We are supposed to be on the same team, but it becomes us versus them. It is really tough.” To overcome the disconnect between teachers and EAs, group “A” participants suggested a formal training program for teachers using EAs, as well as ongoing discussion between teachers and their EAs to discuss the roles and responsibilities of each party in the classroom.

Summary of disconnects. Frustration in group “A” participants seemed to stem largely from perceptions of power imbalances that created a disconnect which they seemed to feel powerless to rectify. This frustration seemed to become cyclical as the teacher candidates felt obligated to reiterate policies to parents and students even when they felt the policies were

unreasonable, or that they had insufficient resources to accomplish the policies they were being asked to enforce. These imbalances created additional challenges for the teacher candidates.

Challenges. Besides the challenges involving the perceived ignorance of stakeholders and disconnects as discussed above, the participants in group “A” struggled with defining words. For example, they questioned the meaning of *success* and who would determine student success. Similarly, participants wondered how *full potential* would look in the classroom. And finally, while they all agreed that teaching takes place only when a child learns, they did not have a response when I asked, “If you teach a lesson, but a child does not learn, are you still a teacher? Or, are you a presenter? A babysitter?” None had an answer, the final responses were: “I don’t even know how to answer that,” and “It’s hard to define the words, very hard.”

Usefulness of fable. The participants in group “A” felt that *The Foal and the Ranch* would have a twofold benefit for combatting ignorance among educational stakeholders. The first benefit would be to inform policy makers, teachers, parents, and students, about the realities of public education; and to give individuals a more realistic perspective on what goes on in the classroom. The second benefit would come from using the fable to initiate discussions between various groups (school community councils, policymakers, administration, teachers, and parents). As an example, one participant said,

Parents would be educated on some of the things that were lacking in our educational system; our superintendents would maybe be more sensitive to some of these areas, and our teachers would be able to express their concerns. It would be a good conversation starter.

The following discussion group was comprised of participants who had been involved with the delivery of education for a longer period of time than these teacher candidates.

Discussion Group “B” (Experienced Educator Group)

Discussion Group “B” consisted of five doctoral candidates in Educational Administration: One male and four females. Participants ranged in age from late 20s to mid-50s. All five had professionally taught at some level: elementary school, high school, university, and/or technical institute. Three participants had Bachelor of Education degrees, and all five were currently involved in education at some level. One of the participants was unmarried with no children while the other four were all married and either had children currently enrolled in public school or their children had graduated from public school. The discussion took place in

the evening at my home. Participants seemed relaxed and eager to discuss the book and its contents. Conversation flowed easily.

Exploring the Discussion

Compared to the first group, group “B” seem to view the educational system from a broader perspective and seemed much more aware (and accepting of) the realities of educational issues. The discussion began with an open invitation for any participant to comment on the fable. One participant offered, “My favourite part was the *no foals left behind* – it was a clever play.” Several participants verbally agreed. Obviously this group was aware of the reference to the United States’ *No Child Left Behind Act*, which may not been known to the other two groups as they made no mention of this particular reference.

The education system. Group “B” participants viewed the issues raised in *The Foal and the Ranch* more systemically than did those in the other two groups. Participant comments concerning the educational system as a whole included funding issues, difference between urban and rural schools, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, diversity, the role of schools in society, charter schools, and the relationship of the educational system to other public services such as health care. Along with those in group “C” (parents), participants did acknowledge the need to define the purpose of education. As teacher candidates, group “A” participants perhaps could not see the forest for the trees, and were focused much more on the practicality of individual policies and practices – not what the intent of those policies should be.

Schools. As part of their discussion on the educational system, participants in group “B” spent time discussing schools. It was suggested “Schools have become factories” and that perhaps “more Ranches – smaller Ranches” were needed. It was generally agreed that, although the trend is the opposite, small schools are preferable to larger ones.

Importance of teachers. Participants in this group believed said that teachers are the most important factor in determining student outcomes. But, unlike parents who based their similar opinion on personal experiences, these educators based their opinions on research. One administrator said, “Time after time, research says that the variable most linked to student success is teachers – good quality teachers.” Disagreement about what percent of teachers are *good quality teachers* will be explored in a later section.

Inclusive education. Participants in group “B” clearly saw the disconnect between what school policy-makers hope to accomplish with differentiated instruction and what is actually

accomplished. Although policy-makers promise to meet the learning needs of all students, most of these educators agreed that “We [teachers] teach to middle.” One dissenter said, “Not me, I teach lower than that, I teach to the bottom.” With that, one added, “We teach to the middle and we send money to the bottom – there is little for the top.” Perhaps the best way to conclude this section on inclusion is in the words of one the participants, a school administrator:

When I look back over 30 years of doing this – how we got so directed towards meeting students’ needs on the struggling end of the curve as opposed to meeting the needs on the gifted end. And I was literally, as I was reading this, saying to myself, *how did we get here?* How we got into that end and not the other end. And I remember a time in my life when I defended it! I said to myself, *those gifted kids will be fine but the other kids may not.* I lived that way until I had a [gifted] son who needed support and now I find myself attending to it, but the majority of the populace is not – they lean the other way.

Usefulness of fable. The Group “B” educators saw *The Foal and the Ranch* as an affirmation towards what they already knew about the educational system. They were not naïve concerning the problems in the current system, nor did they dispute how the educational system was represented in the fable. On the contrary, one administrator said, “The issues in the book are things that are on the table right now . . . things that I deal with every day.” They also mentioned that as they read the book, they pictured students they had taught, and how they – and the system – had failed these children. Group “B” participants saw great value in reading *The Foal and the Ranch* and believed that it would help stakeholders re-examine the purpose of schools and the educational system. They believed that all educational stakeholders would benefit from reading the fable, but it was policy-makers and administrators who were most important as they have the most power to enact change in the educational system.

Discussion Group “C” (Parent Group)

Discussion group “C” consisted of three participants who were all parents of current students in the public education system. Two participants were male and one was female. Two of the participants had two children each (a boy and a girl each), and the final participant had three children (two girls and one boy). Of the seven children, the parents seemed to perceive four of them as “normal, middle-of-the-road,” two of them as higher achievers, and one with health issues that seriously impaired learning. Participants in this group ranged in age from early 40s to

early 50s. Once again, discussion in this group started quickly and participants were immediately engaged.

Exploring the Discussion

In discussion group “C,” what quickly became evident was the deep emotional response that the fable had evoked within the participants. Using words like *overwhelmed* and *outraged*, participants recounted story after story of personal experiences as well as those lived out by other friends, colleagues, and family members. Most of the experiences recounted were negative. Participants said they felt validated as they read *The Foal and the Ranch* because the fable articulated concerns that they had felt, but were previously unable to express. Prior to reading the fable, the parents confessed to being confused and indifferent concerning educational issues. After reading and discussing the book, however, their feelings seemed to range from overwhelmed to empowered. This group seemed anxious to share the book with other parents as well as people who they felt were influential in the educational system.

Drawing parallels between the fable and the educational system. More than the other two groups, the parent group made reference to specific stories within the fable and how they connected to the educational system. One participant admitted that she did not pick up on the significance of the white horses until later on in the fable when the other two breeds were mentioned. After this insight, she observed,

People learn differently, people come from different families, and have different backgrounds, different things are important. . . . Then when you bring a different horse tribe you know, different religions. . . . They’ve got so many different ones in the classroom and it doesn’t work. It works for the norm, but anybody outside of that . . .

This group seemed to feel it was necessary to vocally *connect the dots*. Whereas the other two groups (who were actively involved in the delivery of education) may have felt that the point of the stories in the fable were self-evident and did not require an explanation, this group often recited a scene from the fable and then recounted a similar experience from their own lives.

Physical and emotional responses. As we began the discussion, one participant was visibly drained. He was slouched over, with his head down and his forehead resting in his hand. Without looking up, he motioned towards the book and said, “When I read this I was almost tired. It was cathartic. Emotionally, it was frustrating. I think I ended up frustrated and then

defeated.” He went on to describe the difficult time they are having with their daughter concerning school and social choices.

Nodding in agreement, another participant said, “I had a hard time reading the book, too. I was pissed off the whole time reading it! Because, what is education? What is the purpose of education?” She went on to describe the difficulties they had had with their daughter and “fighting the educational system.” This participant complained,

It’s all about the money . . . ‘This is the best we have so it will have to do and will just gloss over it and give it a fancy new name’ like the government does, and paint a pretty picture and hope it doesn’t fall down around our ears while our kids are struggling in school.

The third participant added his own story of his brother who had special needs and was forced to attend five different schools in a short period of time. He believed that his brother made out okay because of his personality type, but the participant wondered about the effects on other children who are discriminated against in schools.

The importance of teachers. The attention of the participants then turned to the enormous value of teachers in determining student success. Each of them gave examples of how powerful of a positive influence good teachers had been in the lives of their children. They also recounted stories where teachers did not engage the students so the students became bored and began to hate school and dislike learning. The conclusion from this group agreed with the comments from educators in group “B” that the greatest factor in determining student success is quality teachers, but that often “teachers were handcuffed by policy.”

Usefulness of fable. The group “C” parents felt that the educational system would most benefit if parents and students read *The Foal and the Ranch*. They said that their view of politicians was similar to how policy-making was presented in the fable. Elected officials often do not make policies changes if the changes will jeopardize their personal careers. One participant said, “The one discussion in the book where the mayors all realized that change and commitment meant they all lost their jobs pretty much summed it up for me – I’m a cynic from here on in.” As such, they believed that it would take a grassroots effort from parents and students to create the political will to change.

Observations From All Three Groups

While there was overlap between the content discussed in the three groups, there were three specific topics that each group touched on: gifted education, the generational aspect of education, and the complexity of defining words.

Gifted Education

The Foal and the Ranch dealt with how the educational system handled foals who were either behind or beyond the average developmental level of their peers. Participants from group “A” were quite vocal about how the fable raised the issue of gifted education in schools. Although they had spent considerable time in their teacher training discussing how to differentiate instruction for those that are struggling, they said that not only was gifted education never mentioned, it seemed to be a forbidden issue. One participant said, “Gifted education is a taboo topic, and that is a discredit to the educational system.” The teacher candidates seemed thankful for the opportunity to discuss the problems they have dealt with both professionally and personally with students who display capabilities beyond those of the same age.

Group “B” was mixed in their views of gifted education within *The Foal and the Ranch*. Some regarded it as a primary theme while one stated, “I didn’t see it as being about gifted education at all.” Group “C” participants did not seem to see the examples in the book so much about gifted education as about how schools do or do not meet the needs of those outside of the norm.

Generational Impact of Education

One issue that I had not really considered when writing the fable, but that seemed to really impact several participants, was the generational aspect of the story. In discussion group “B,” one participant commented, “One thing that frustrated me was there was five generations in the fable and we’re still doing the same thing.” Another participant added, “That’s really interesting and a good point!” [others verbally agreed].

In discussion group “C” one participant lamented, “. . . how wounded every generation was: the great grandpa, the grandpa, the dad, right? How wounded they all were from it. And that carries along in your attitude towards education in your home.” The parent concluded with a somewhat morose view of the educational system: “If education can be given some perspective, maybe it wouldn’t be so harmful.”

Definitions

As in group “A,” all three of the groups acknowledged the difficulty in defining words such as *success*, *education*, *potential*, and *teach*. Those in group “B” also debated the purpose of education itself; but they seemed to concede that it was a topic too large for impactful discussion, considering the context and time constraints. They quickly granted to each other that it was a complicated matter and they allowed the issue to drop.

Summary of Discussion Groups

In the larger sense, each discussion group represented a collection of people from a similar segment of educational stakeholders: teacher candidates, educators, and parents. But within each group, there was also diversity (age, background, marital status, number of children, etc.). What all three groups had in common was a passionate interest in discussing educational issues and exploring how the fable related to their real lives. Discussion in each group was free-flowing and participants were all eager to share their views. How the groups differed, however, was in their emotional response to *The Foal and the Ranch*. The new teachers felt frustrated, the experienced educators felt affirmed, and the parents felt overwhelmed. Although each group focused on different specific issues, they all felt that all educational stakeholders could benefit from reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. To explore participant reaction further, and to determine the perceptions each participant had about their own transformation throughout this experience, each participant also completed two surveys.

Survey Findings

At the outset of each discussion, each participant was asked to complete a pre-discussion survey relating to their perceptions of how they were impacted by reading *The Foal and the Ranch*. At the conclusion of each discussion, participants were given a post-discussion survey to determine their feelings about reading *and discussing* the fable.

Pre-Discussion Survey

Table 3 shows the average responses on the pre-discussion survey for each group (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

Table 3

Pre-Discussion Survey Responses

Question	Group Mean			
	A	B	C	Mean
Reading <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> caused me to think about educational issues I had not previously considered.	4.0	3.8	4.7	4.2
Reading <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> has caused me to think more critically about educational issues beyond those mentioned in the fable.	4.0	4.0	4.3	4.1
Reading <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> will make talking about educational policies and issues easier.	4.0	4.0	4.3	4.1
Reading <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> will make talking about educational policies and issues more engaging.	4.7	N/A	N/A	4.7
I found the format of a fable to be an effective way for me to learn.	4.3	4.2	5	4.5
<i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> will help promote productive discussion on educational issues.	4.3	4.2	4.7	4.4
While I was reading <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> , I thought of someone that needs to read this book.	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.7

Note: Due to redundancy, question four was removed from the survey after group “A”

The data from the pre-discussion survey reveal that, on average, participants agreed with the positive statements about the effects of reading *The Foal and the Ranch*. Participant responses were especially favourable in the final three questions. Two of the questions were pertaining to the effectiveness of the fable to assist in learning and in promoting productive discussion on educational issues. The final question sought to answer whether or not participants thought of someone else who needs to read the fable. Each of these questions had an average response of 4.4 out of five or greater. These responses indicate that participants found value in reading *The Foal and the Ranch* and felt that not only were they enriched, they agreed that others would benefit from the experience as well. Due to potential relational influence I may have had on these (and other) responses, future research would be valuable to investigate these same questions on a broader scale. This will be addressed under the heading *Implications for Further*

Research. A further analysis of the individual groups will be provided below under the heading of *Survey Responses by Group*.

Post-Discussion Survey

At the conclusion of each discussion, each participant completed a post-discussion survey relating to their perceptions of how they had been impacted by reading and discussing the fable.

Table 4 shows the average responses on the post-discussion survey for each group.

Table 4

Post-Discussion Survey Responses

Question	Group Mean			
	A	B	C	Mean
Reading and discussing <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> has caused me to think differently about one or more issues in education.	4.3	3.6	5	4.3
<i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> made talking about educational policies and issues easier for me.	4.7	3.6	5	4.4
<i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> helped focus discussions about educational policies and issues.	4.7	4.2	5	4.6
After reading <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> , I felt more confident discussing educational issues.	4.0	2.8	4.3	3.7
Overall, <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> helped promote productive discussion on educational issues.	4.7	4.2	5.0	4.6

Overall, Table 4 shows that participants felt that reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* was a worthwhile exercise that contributed to positive personal change and facilitated focussed and productive dialogue on educational issues. The responses of individual groups will be explored below, but one notable observation in Table 4 is the pattern of responses between groups. For each positive statement, Parents (group “C”) responded with the highest level of agreement, teacher candidates (group “A”) had the next highest responses, and experienced educators (group “B”) had the lowest levels of agreement. This is consistent with the findings that experienced educators perceived themselves to have been transformed the least by exposure to *The Foal and the Ranch*, while parents reported the greatest perceived self-transformation. A further breakdown of responses to both surveys will be provided below.

Survey Responses by Group

The following section explores the tendencies within each group and examines how group responses compare to those of the other two groups.

Group “A” survey responses. The first two questions in the pre-discussion survey pertain to the impact *The Foal and the Ranch* had on the thought processes of participants. All three respondents agreed (scale rating of four) that their thinking had changed and expanded as a result of reading the fable. More than any other discussion group, the participants in group “A” prefaced many of their comments with “I think . . .” This seemed to indicate that these teacher candidates were still considering and wrestling with many of the educational issues that were being discussed. Perhaps because of their relative inexperience, they had not yet established firm beliefs. In addition, their active thinking may have been a result of their changing roles. Participants in this group regularly commented from their own various perspectives of teacher, student, parent, and educational assistant.

All group “A” participants either agreed (scale rating of four) or strongly agreed (scale rating of five) that reading *The Foal and the Ranch* would make talking about issues more engaging, that it would help promote productive discussion, that the fable was an effective way to learn, and that they knew of someone who should read the fable.

Group “B” survey responses. In the first six pre-discussion survey questions, the average response of participants was between 3.8 and 4.2. This seems to indicate that participants agreed with the overall usefulness and benefit towards promoting productive discussion on educational issues. Perhaps the best endorsement for the usefulness of the fable was participant responses to question number seven. Four out of the five participants strongly agreed that while they were reading *The Foal and the Ranch* they had thought of someone the needs to read this book. The overall average response from group “B” participants for question seven was 4.8 – the second highest possible average from five participants.

In the post discussion survey, responses from group “B” seem to indicate agreement about the overall benefits of reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. The average response to all but one question ranged between 3.6 and 4.6 on the Likert scale. The one exception was question four (which rated 2.8). As most of these participants had been involved with education for many years, they did not really feel more confident in discussing educational issues after reading the fable. They felt that the fable merely confirmed what they already knew.

Based on comments from discussion group “A,” a tenth question was added for groups “B” and “C”. This question asked participants to rank the order in which five different stakeholder groups should read *The Foal and the Ranch*. Table 7 indicates participant responses.

Table 5

Group “B” Responses to Question 10

Question	Rank	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5
In my opinion, for productive discussion to occur, the group that should read this book first...second...third is: (choose from: Policy Makers, Administrators, Teachers, Parents, Students),	1st	Policy Makers	Policy Makers	Policy Makers	Teachers	Teachers
	2nd	Parents	Admin	Admin	Students	Admin
	3rd	Admin	Teachers	Teachers	Parents	Policy Makers
	4th	Teachers	Parents	Parents	Admin	Parents
	5th	Students	Students	Students	Policy Makers	Students

The responses from group “B” indicate that, generally speaking, those higher up in the educational system would benefit the most from reading the fable. Three participants ranked policy-makers first, while parents and students were generally listed toward the bottom. When asked to explain their choices, the responses were:

B2: “Hard to rank...I think all groups would benefit.”

B3: “In order to have a discussion throughout the province on these issues, those in charge need to understand the material before.”

B4: “In order, then get together in groups (mixed) to discuss.”

B5: “Teachers are the most influential group connected to student learning – need to think that they can make a difference.”

Group “C” survey responses. The responses from the pre-discussion survey seem to indicate that reading *The Foal and the Ranch* had a substantial impact on the participants in group “C”. The average response for all seven questions was 4.33 or above. The one question to which all three respondents answered *strongly agree* was question five: *I found the format of a fable to be an effective way for me to learn*. Because this group was comprised of parents who were not teachers or academics, these responses seem to confirm my suspicion that while information may be available to people, it must be provided in a format that can easily be read and understood.

The post-discussion survey further reinforced the position that respondents in this group had been transformed through the process of reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. The first five questions of the survey pertained to the perception each participant had of how the

fable changed them individually and how well it promoted discussion. Four of the first five questions had an average response of five, and the fifth question had an average response of 4.33. In addition, all three participants strongly agreed that parents would benefit from reading the fable (average rating of five).

The average scores for the final three questions were negatively influenced by the responses of C1. While the other two participants responded that they strongly agreed that educators, policymakers, and high school students, would benefit from reading and discussing the book; C1 responded much more negatively (strongly disagree, neutral, strongly disagree). Upon first review, I suspected that C1 misunderstood the question as the responses did not seem consistent with other C1 responses. After reviewing the comments for question 10, however, there may be another explanation which I will revisit below.

Table 6 shows the order in which the members from group “C” believed would be most productive in creating productive discussion.

Table 6

Group “C” Responses to Question 10

Question	Rank	C1	C2	C3
In my opinion, for productive discussion to occur, the group that should read this book first...second...third is: (choose from: Policy Makers, Administrators, Teachers, Parents, Students)	1st	Parents	Parents	Parents
	2nd	Teachers	Students	Teachers
	3rd	Students	Teachers	Students
	4th	Administration	Administration	Administration
	5th	Policy Makers	Policy Makers	Policy Makers

In stark contrast to group “B,” group “C” ranked the stakeholders in question 10 very differently. All three indicated that for productive discussion to occur, parents should be the first to read *The Foal and the Ranch*. In all three lists from group “C,” administration was ranked fourth and policy makers were last. The rationale behind their rankings may be seen in the following comments:

C1: “Policy makers would need to be politically ‘leaned on’ (persuaded) to make right decisions.”

C2: “I don’t think policy makers will change anything unless they are forced to. I think parents, students, and teachers, will make this happen.”

C3: “You need to get parents and teachers on board first – they are the greatest in number – then students – this large group will be/create the push for change and then you get Admin on board and the whole system will then push the policy makers for actual change.”

These comments, perhaps best described as cynical, reflect the tone of the entire discussion. These parents were angry with the educational system and overwhelmed by the enormity of the task at hand if positive change is to occur. They seemed to feel that until there was a grassroots movement from students, parents, and teachers; there was little reason for optimism for positive change with administration and, especially, policy makers. This pessimism may have been reflected in the low scores provided by C1 for questions seven, eight, and nine of the post-discussion survey. The three responses of C1, however, do not completely line up with this theory either, so the reasons behind the low ratings are inexplicable to me. Without further explanation, I will accept the apparent inconsistency and take the participant’s responses at face value.

Perceived Transformation of Each Discussion Group

After receiving feedback from the first discussion group, a specific question pertaining to individual transformation was added. Nearing the conclusion of the discussions, each participant was asked to rate their transformation on a scale from one to 10 (10 being the most transformation). Table 7 shows average participant responses for each group regarding perceived personal transformation.

Table 7

Responses to Personal Transformation

Question	Group Mean			Mean
	A	B	B3	
On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = not at all, 10 = completely): To what extent has your thinking about educational issues been transformed as a result of reading and discussing <i>The Foal and the Ranch</i> ?	7.5	3.8	9.0	6.8

As I explore the responses, the groups will be examined in order from those who felt the least transformation to those who felt the most.

Discussion group “B.” Of the three discussion groups, the participants that felt they had been transformed the least by their exposure to *The Foal and the Ranch* were those from group

“B”. On a scale of 1 to 10, group “B” (those with the most experience in the educational system) rated themselves an average of 3.8. When asked to use the word to describe the extent their transformation (i.e. *somewhat* transformed; *completely* transformed, etc.), this group did not feel that *transformed* was even the correct word to use. Instead, they all chose their own word. The following are the comments from each participant (not in the order they were provided):

B1: Instead of transform, I would say *cause to reflect*. Ultimately, I don’t think I’ve changed my thinking, over the past 30 years, I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about education. But something like this could help people reflect because it’s like any of Aesop’s fables or Aboriginal stories – other ways of knowing – it causes you to reflect on what’s going on around you. I think for other people who maybe haven’t spent as much time pondering these issues over their lifetime, as we have, it could be quite transformative.

B2: I went with the number three, not because I don’t value the work – quite the opposite. It is a very valuable work and for a pre-service teacher the number would probably be higher. This book represents one of the most relevant paths of discussion you can have regarding the nature and type of education. Instead of *transform*, the word I would choose is *reinforce relevance*, it’s emblematic.

B3: My word would be, *challenged*. I’m an ideological person. I have a very solid basis and awareness of where my thinking comes from. But this book challenges me to think about the kids and the people who I initially would say I don’t care about, because they are not the ones who aren’t going to make it, they aren’t the ones who are going to end up in jail.

B4: I am studying threshold learning: you have to bang your head against the situation until you finally break through to the other side, so I’m banging my head on this. There’s nothing in here that I haven’t experienced or hadn’t felt before. I am thinking of where I can go with this knowledge and how I can transform myself to help transform the system but so far I’m still banging my head. The word I chose was *expandedly*. It made me think of larger issues and how everything in the education system relates to

how we do things in society. My nephew's girlfriend is in education, if she reads this, it would be extremely transformative for her.

B5: Affirmed. The things that are dealt with in the book are things that I deal with every day. They are things that I've lived for 32 years. I don't know that I've been transformed as much so I was affirmed and what I was thinking you put into a story. I put at the very top of the book, *with the best of intentions* [quoting a line from the book]. I don't think any educational system is going to try and harm children. Some situations give better opportunity to some children than to others and that is a fact. Somehow we have to try not to lose kids through the cracks.

The data shown in Table 7 along with the comments made by participants in group "B" indicate that although experienced educators felt little transformation as a result of reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*, they were impacted nonetheless. Using words like "affirmed" and "challenged," these group "B" participants felt that the fable gave them an opportunity to reflect on the education system, to see issues from a broader perspective, and to ponder where the discussion should go from here.

Discussion group "A." Group "A" confirmed what participant B2 suspected: pre-service teachers found the book more transformative than those in group "B." On the pre-discussion survey, two of the three participants agreed that reading *The Foal and the Ranch* was a transformative experience for them, and the final participant was neutral. On the post discussion survey, all three participants agreed that discussing the fable was a transformative experience for them. Group "A" responses to perceived transformation was 7.5 out of 10 compared to the group "B" average of less than four.

The transformative theme that emerged from discussion group "A" was that the stories in the book and the subsequent discussion brought awareness to participants of multiple perspectives on educational issues. As one participant put it, "It's the kind of book you need to talk about after. After our class discussion, people came up to me and said, 'I didn't see what you saw.'"

To this, another participant responded that after the class discussion she "went back and read [the story of the woman and the green dress] again, to get a different perspective on it."

One participant from group “A” summarized the benefits of educational stakeholders reading and then discussing the elements of *The Foal and the Ranch* by saying,

At the very least, through the discussion, you would see the perspectives of everyone. If you have someone who does not agree with the book, then why? What are your experiences? Why are you saying this is an inaccurate portrayal? Why? People need to be open to discussion.

Overall, participants in group “A” felt they had been moderately transformed from the experience with *The Foal and the Ranch*. These teacher candidates felt that the fable accurately represented the situations in the education system that they find frustrating and expanded their perspectives by providing alternative viewpoints to common scenarios. Group “A” participants also felt that the greatest benefit of the fable would be the post-reading discussions it would generate between stakeholders, and that these discussions would yield more personal and systemic transformations.

Discussion group “C.” Compared to those from the other two groups, it was the parent group (“C”) who felt they were the most transformed by reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. As one participant was filling out the questions about individual transformation, he said, “What was cool about [the book] is that it articulated and brought to the forefront a lot of thoughts and emotions and things that I couldn’t articulate. . . . The feelings and scenarios that we are living through, oh yeah.”

On a rating scale of transformation, these three participants averaged a rating of nine (10, nine, and eight). When asked to say their rating and explain their rationale for their rating, the participants said:

C1: Ten. I was completely transformed. I believe that it was a truth that was under the surface of real-life experiences hence why you got parents here, I’m sure. And things that we’ve been dealing with first-hand that hits really close to home right now. So the thought patterns touch on a lot of these issues and really encompassed and brought to light not just what we are dealing with, but the magnitude and all-encompassing challenge that it is creating for us to make the decisions we’re making. It really answered a lot of my own questions as far as, okay, now I know why I am so internally battling with something that I am told is simple black-and-white.

But when I actually internalize it and think about it for myself, I can't make it black and white, there are so many other variables. And you painted that picture for me so well that personally, that is why I said *completely* because wow! Someone else has actually done this thinking and verbalized for me what I was not confident in, and that the magnitude was as big as it is, and why I can't make a snap decision on something. I feel validated.

C2: Nine. Completely. I think a lot of parents when they send their kids to school they are just happy to have them out of the house and they have a baby-sitter, but I think as your kids do more you start to see this stuff. But I would've never put it together without your book [another participant verbally agreed]. I think with all of us is more about the outrage that we do have to change, but until reading the book, I just thought my kid has this many more years of school and then we were done [another participant agreed, and shouted, "Just two more years!"] I think it was a real eye-opener and I appreciate it [another participant agreed] when I was reading the book I just couldn't turn the pages fast enough, I really enjoyed it and there are so many examples that I was like, *that's exactly right!* I think we can make a difference after reading a book like this because at least for all on the same plane, we're thinking the same way: these things are all wrong, there are so many things are wrong there happening. Where before as an individual without having all this information there was nothing I could do about it so I just wait until my time is up and *good luck* to my kids and their kids. But now I'm saying, *that's wrong, we should be doing more and we should be trying to change the system because it's broken.*

C3: Eight. Significantly. I've been having a shift in the mindset of education for a while, so this validated my thoughts and showed, not only the fact that I was having, and like [another participant] was saying, the whole scope of it. But I was very disappointed when I turned the last page and your [author's] opinion wasn't there. I was looking forward to it the whole time. Where do you start?

At this point I asked C3, “[C1] said he felt overwhelmed, and you seem to agree. Is it overwhelmed in a good way – like we need to do something? Or do you feel it is too big to change?”

C3: For me personally, yeah because what can I do? That’s how I feel, what can I do? Because it’s beyond me. Who makes a decision? The Provincial government. All of a sudden they decide – boom! More hours in school, they attach 15 minutes onto every day where [students] are not listening anyway. What’s the point of that?

C2: The one thing I really got out of this, I wanted to give this book to a bunch of my friends. A bunch of friends are teachers and principals and business leaders – we’ve got to get into action. There has to be action done. This gives us kind of a blueprint on things that are wrong now we have to make improvements. I’d like to have about five copies because I would like to give it to a bunch of people and just ask them, *what do you think?* You’ve got me all energetic and gung ho!

C1: “Did you send a copy to John Gormley [local talk radio host]?”

C2: I think could be an excellent idea to give this book to parents even when the kids are in preschool so they have some idea what they want for their kids’ education. I think a lot of times they just think “thank you, he’s out of our hair!” This way they would really think.

Not only did the participants in group “C” perceive their personal transformation the highest of all the groups, the impact the fable had on each one personally was tangible. Participants were visibly emotional and they displayed signs of extreme anger, hopelessness, frustration, and exhaustion. The fable seemed to confirm what parents suspected about the state of education – that policies are sometimes made for political reasons and that lack of resources often result in a disconnect between what parents are told and what actually happens in schools. The personal transformations caused a range of responses from indifference and surrender to the enormity and complexity of the problems. This attitude was witnessed in the participant who shouted out, “Just two more years!” On the contrary, another parent who was also frustrated with the educational system felt that for the sake of their children and grandchildren, it was up to parents to get educated and take action. All three of the parents agreed that it would take large

numbers of parents experiencing a similar transformation to produce the political will necessary to inspire change.

Examining Cognitive and Affective Learning Displayed in Each Group

For analysis of the comments made by participants in group discussions, I utilized Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Learning (Appendix C) to attempt to discover the levels of cognitive learning that took place in individual participants. In addition, Bloom's Affective Learning rubric (Appendix B) was used to determine the levels of social learning that had occurred through participant interaction. For the purpose of this study, dialogue was considered meaningful if participants operated in the first three levels of affective learning (Receiving, Responding, and Valuing); whereas the highest two levels (Organization and Characterization) constituted productive dialogue. The underlying distinguishing characteristics were that meaningful dialogue occurred when participants listened, shared, and sought to understand the perspectives of other participants, whereas productive dialogue involved action, or the creation of an action plan.

Group "A"

Participants in group "A" (teacher candidates) indicated the highest levels of both cognitive and affective learning as below.

Cognitive learning. In group "A," cognitive learning in the lower three levels (remembering, understanding, and applying) seemed no different from the other groups in spite of the fact that it had been several months since they read the book. In fact, this was the only group in which none of the participants had the book open in front of them, or even opened it when they made reference to specific passages (the other two groups had read the book less than 10 days prior to the discussion and most of them referred back to the book throughout the discussions).

One example of a participant analyzing the events in the fable was her reflection on the fable after she was required to write in educational fable of her own. She said,

So, you wrote a fable and yes, it is an easy read, but the amount of research that went into it was a lot! And that was apparent when I wrote my fable. I didn't see it when I read [*The Foal and the Ranch*] because it was very, you know, fluid. It was, everything connected, it was, *I'm understanding, I'm understanding.*

Within this group, evaluating was evident as participants listened and considered different viewpoints especially pertaining to the story of the green dress.

When asked what role a book such as *The Foal and the Ranch* could take in promoting discussion on educational issues, participants displayed cognitive learning at the creating level. Participants in this group suggested that schools do regular professional development days discussing the issues raised in the fable and how they pertain to life in their school. These meetings would include school staff, school community council members, and administrators. Additionally, this group showed that they had reached a level of thinking of creating as they each had written an original fable about educational issues. Because this was a class assignment, however, it is doubtful they would have gone to the effort of writing their own fable had it not been a course requirement.

Affective learning. Similar to cognitive learning, group “A” participants regularly displayed affective learning within the lowest three categories (receiving, responding, and valuing). Beyond this meaningful dialogue, productive dialogue was manifested as participants strategized how the fable could be incorporated in professional development days and other educational venues. Specifically, the level of organization was often evident as participants integrated the perspectives of others into their comments. Additionally, participants regularly interjected into the comments of others and completed the thoughts and sentences of other group members. These interruptions did not seem to offend or hinder discussion; on the contrary, they seem to build momentum and connect the participants. These connections allowed participants to internalize the perspectives of others; in doing so they reached the highest level of affective learning, characterization.

Group “B”

Although group “B” had substantially more involvement with the educational system and participants were the most educated of all the groups, I did not observe behaviour at the highest learning levels in either the cognitive or affective learning domains.

Cognitive learning. As this group had extensive experience in the educational system, and they easily recognized the parallels between the fable and real-life situations such as the *no foal left behind* reference. The level of analyzing was clearly evident as one participant went so far as to write out the educational issues that various events in the fable were intended to exemplify. The list this participant provided was nearly identical to the list I had used as my

notes in creating *The Foal and the Ranch*. In fact, the participant had found several educational issues in the fable that I had not intentionally included.

One of the themes evident in this group (as it was in the other two groups) was the importance of skilled teachers who actively engage all the students in their class. Evaluating was evident in participants as one participant estimated that 80% of teachers regularly differentiated instruction and engaged every student in their classroom. The other participants in this group disagreed, believing that it was, at most, 50% (the parent group agreed it would be no more than 20%). And while participants in this group discussed in vague terms how schools were actively attempting to rectify some of the problems mentioned in the fable, or acknowledged the complexities of some of the issues, there was no indications that participants had reached the cognitive learning level of creating.

Affective learning. The participants in group “B” clearly displayed the affective learning levels of receiving, responding, and valuing and therefore satisfied the requisites of meaningful dialogue. They were all willing and patient listeners, even when they disagreed with the perspective of another. Some organization was evident as participants asked for clarification, but I did not detect participants had really integrated the perspective of another into their own belief system. I can speculate as to three possible explanations for their lack of integration: (a) their own beliefs were too firmly entrenched; (b) they simply did not agree with other perspectives; or, (c) they already had similar perspectives to begin with.

The closest indication that one of the participants in this group may have reached the level of characterization was when the participant admitted that she had not previously considered the perspective of gifted children in public education. She said,

I’ve always been on the end of the disadvantaged, the disabled in our society. I’ve always thought gifted students will be fine, so let’s focus on the ones that need help. This fable brought things out for me. I can’t say my thinking has been completely shifted . . . It got me thinking about it, and that’s the first step to anything, right?

It was difficult to determine if this statement indicated characterization or organization, or if it was an indication of the lower level of valuing.

Group “C”

The parent group (group “C”) evidenced the highest levels of learning in the cognitive domain. However, because of their similar perspectives it was difficult to assess if organization or characterization took place in the affective domain.

Cognitive learning. As with the other groups, the cognitive learning levels of remembering, understanding, applying, and analyzing, were evident throughout their discussion. Participants also showed evaluating as they commented on the role of the Provincial Training Group (PTG) in creating policy for the Ranches. One participant said, “It’s all about the money.” Another participant added, “The one discussion in the book where the mayors all realized that change and commitment meant they all lost their jobs pretty much summed it up for me, I’m a cynic from here on in, but I’d like to change that.”

Two of the parent participants in this group seemed to want to reach the level of creating by proposing a solution, but did not feel capable. Said one participant,

Yeah, actually, yeah, being frustrated and overwhelmed and not willing to begin the process that needs to be . . . It’s such a huge . . . How you change it? How do you begin it? How you take a first step? Of course discussion is one of them.

Are you willing to sacrifice?

The other participant agreed, “Yeah, what can I do? That’s how I feel, what can I do? Because it’s beyond me.”

The third parent did generate an action plan. He said,

The one thing I really got out of this, I wanted to give this book to a bunch of my friends. A bunch of friends are teachers and principals and business leaders – we’ve got to get into action. There has to be action done . . . I’d like to have about five copies because I would like to give it to a bunch of people and just ask them, *what do you think?* You’ve got me all energetic and gung ho! [This participant did come back several days later and get five more books to distribute]

Affective learning. All three participants clearly showed that they were receiving, responding, and valuing the thoughts and opinions of the others, thus meaningful dialogue was obvious. It was somewhat difficult to determine if organization and characterization occurred because although the experiences of each participant were unique, they more or less reinforced a similar perspective that was shared by the other participants. Perhaps the one example of

characterization may have been the nonverbal agreement given to the participant wanting to take action.

Group Summaries

Three discussion groups consisting of three to five participants each met together to discuss their readings of *The Foal and the Ranch*. Discussion group “A” comprised three teacher candidates, group “B” was made up of five experienced educators who were also doctoral candidates, and group “C” consisted of three parents with children currently involved as students in the public educational system. Discussion in all three groups flowed continually and the participants in each group believed that the fable could be a valuable tool in promoting informed discussion among educational stakeholders. Each group could be characterized differently, however, and they each perceived the extent of their own transformation differently.

Group “A”

The teacher candidates that comprised group “A” were frustrated with the educational system. They did not feel that policy-makers understood what really goes on in a classroom, and speculated that reading *The Foal and the Ranch* along with some visits to “real” classrooms would help open the eyes of policy-makers, and help incite positive discussion with teachers and parents. Group “A” participants also felt somewhat powerless as they felt trapped within the disconnectedness of policies and practices, as well as caught in tensions between teachers and administrators; and parents and educational associates. The teacher candidates felt that reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* caused them to be somewhat transformed. Of all the groups, participants in group “A” showed the highest levels of both cognitive and affective learning in their comments and interactions. Dialogue between participants was meaningful and participants worked together to formulate a plan whereby *The Foal and the Ranch* could be utilized in professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in education.

Group “B”

As might have been predicted, the doctoral candidates and experienced educators that made up group “B” viewed the educational system in more broad terms than did the participants in the other two groups. Because of their vast experience, the participants did not feel that reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* was considerably transformative for them. Instead, these participants felt that the fable was affirming and accurately represented what they

see in schools every day. Although meaningful dialogue did occur in this group, familiarity with the educational issues may have contributed to this group showing the lowest levels of both cognitive and affective learning among the three groups. Group “B” felt that *The Foal and the Ranch* would be a very useful tool in promoting dialogue among educational stakeholders and believed that change would have to come from the top (i.e. policy-makers).

Group “C”

The parents who comprised group “C” felt outraged and overwhelmed as they read and discussed *The Foal and the Ranch*. Their conversation was replete with personal examples of how the educational system was falling short of their expectations. Although they described themselves as angry and “pissed off” as they read the fable, they felt extremely validated as what they read articulated many of the feelings they have had about schools for years. These parents indicated that they felt extremely transformed after interacting around the fable, and displayed moderately high levels of cognitive and affective learning (less than group “A” but more than group “B”). One participant in this group felt very motivated to take action toward change while the other two seemed more overwhelmed and displayed an attitude of “Just two more years [until their kids are done school and it is not their problem anymore]!” One point of consensus amongst those in this parent group was the belief that if change was to occur, it would come from a grassroots movement among parents and students. These parents did not believe that policy-makers would make the necessary changes until pressure was put on them by the masses.

Summary of Chapter Five

After reading *The Foal and the Ranch*, 11 educational stakeholders were brought together into one of three groups to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the fable. All participants in this study agreed that the fable would be a valuable tool in promoting dialogue concerning educational issues. Although each group displayed distinctive characteristics, they were similar in that the conversations in every group flowed easily and continually, as the fable evoked meaningful discussion in each group. The group of teacher candidates felt frustrated with inconsistencies in the educational system and said they felt they were moderately transformed by this experience. The experienced educators (group “B”) said they felt affirmed by the *The Foal and the Ranch* as stories in the fable represent issues they deal with every day. Because of their familiarity with the educational system, this group said they felt minimal personal transformation. This was confirmed as this group showed the least cognitive and affective

learning in their discussion. The final group, parents (group “C”), said they felt validated by *The Foal and the Ranch* because it articulated feelings they have had about the educational system but had not been able to put into words. Parents also felt angry toward the educational system and overwhelmed at the prospect of reform. This group felt they had been meaningfully transformed by this experience and believed that if any positive change was to transpire, it would take a grassroots effort of parents and students pressuring policy-makers to change policies. Although perceived personal transformation varied between groups, all participants supported the usefulness of the fable to enhance productive dialogue among educational stakeholders. How these findings relate to theory, as well as the implications for stakeholders and future research will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings, Conclusions, and Implications

This dissertation began with the recounting of the experiences of my own family's navigation through the educational system, especially with regards to our exceptional child. The extant canon of literature regarding the state of education was insufficient to inspire meaningful dialogue among educational stakeholders. In Chapter Two, I began by presenting an argument for the enhanced use of the humanities for educational purposes. Previous authors have described the humanities as a bridge, as transformational, and as both a mirror and as a window for readers. In the same chapter, I presented a toolkit to identify typical breakdowns in language and informal logic along with literary devices that contribute to the seemingly ineffective communication between stakeholders in education. Chapter Four began with the detailing of many policies and practices that I believe led to the existing paradoxes and fallacies I have witnessed in the educational system. Chapter Four concluded with a deconstruction of how these policies were integrated into *The Foal and The Ranch*. The effect of drawing parallels between real-life policies and the events in the fable, and then showing the fallacious thinking and paradoxes in the fictitious story, made it easier to recognize the same fallacies and paradoxes in real life. Chapter Five summarized the findings from each of the three participant discussion groups as I sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. To what extent do educational stakeholders perceive they were transformed by their experience reading and discussing a fable about educational issues?
2. What levels of dialogue are displayed as participants offer their observations, perceptions, and recommendations in response to reading and collectively interacting with a selected fable?

This final chapter crystalizes my own deconstruction of the fable (Chapter Four) with the findings from participant responses (Chapter Five). Merging the information from these two chapters will consider the usefulness of *The Foal and the Ranch* (as a representation of the humanities in the context of educational policy challenges) and answer the research questions. Additionally, I will explore the implications of this study for theory, policy, and practice; and explain how this dissertation helped fill the gap in existing research and provides a foundation for future research.

Relevance of The Foal and the Ranch

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the error I was most in danger of committing in this dissertation was the fallacy of the false analogy. Throughout the research, I was cognizant to be alert to any sign that participants did not feel that the fable accurately represented the challenges and present realities of public education in Saskatchewan. As policy-makers, administrators, teachers, educational associates, and parents, participants in this study came with multiple perspectives on the Provincial education system. Even with the variety of standpoints, there was no indication that any of the participants felt that the issues conveyed in the fable misrepresented or distorted the current realities of public education. Educators said they felt affirmed by the fable, and parents said *The Foal and the Ranch* verified feelings they had had but not been able to articulate. Further, when speaking of the fable, the participant with the most experience in public education in the Province said, “The issues in the book are things that are on the table right now...things that I deal with every day.” As was noted under the Chapter Two heading of *Communicating Meaning through Storytelling*, for a story to be effective, it need not give a factual account of what has occurred, but it must mirror reality enough that the reader can relate to, and draw meaning from, the fictitious events. Participants in this study indicated that they related to the events in the fable and drew meaning from the stories told within its pages. Therefore, I am confident that *The Foal and the Ranch* was an effective story and a relevant analogy to the Saskatchewan public school system.

Answering the Research Questions

Due to the varied responses to perceived transformation between the discussion groups, answering question one is best done by separately exploring the responses of each group. Question two yields a much more uniform response and all groups will therefore be included in a singular response.

Research Question One

The first research question for this study was:

1. To what extent do educational stakeholders perceive they were transformed by their experience reading and discussing a fable about educational issues?

The data revealed that the extent of perceived transformation among stakeholders was consistent within groups, but varied considerably between groups. Due to the relatively small number of participants needed for discussion groups, it is difficult to identify the specific

variable(s) responsible for the disparity between discussion groups. Variables such as differences in ways of knowing, tough-minded versus tender-hearted participants, and a myriad of other personal characteristics may have led to participants in each group indicating different levels of personal transformation. Due to the logic behind how the discussion groups were initially chosen (experienced educators, new educators, and non-educators), I have chosen to use educational experience as the differentiating variable when considering participant responses.

Participants with extensive experience. Of the three discussion groups, the group comprised of educators with vast experience in the educational system (group “B”) indicated that they felt that they had been transformed the least by the experience of reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. On the survey, this group of educators rated their individual transformation as 3.8 out of 10. They felt that the fable did not tell them anything they did not already know and agreed that rather than *transforming*, they would describe the experience as *affirming*. As one participant said, the issues in the fable “are things that I deal with every day.” When their discussion was assessed for cognitive learning, the results confirmed the self-assessments, as the participants in this group displayed little evidence of high levels of learning.

In spite of their own lack of transformation, these experienced educators felt that humanities such as *The Foal and the Ranch* would be excellent tools to help bring stakeholders together to discuss educational issues. Specifically, they felt that the fable would be helpful for policy-makers to better understand the current state of education and to inspire change. Although participants in this group believed parents and students would benefit from reading and discussing the fable, these educators said that significant change would be a result of changes coming down from the highest levels of educational leadership.

Participants with moderate experience. Teacher candidates with moderate experience in the delivery of education (group “A”) showed a moderate level of perceived transformation. On survey responses, they indicated that the experience of reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* was transformational of 7.5 on a scale out of 10. Of the three groups, these teacher candidates showed the highest levels of cognitive learning. I attribute this combination of moderate transformation with high levels of cognitive learning to their current position in the educational field. With some experience in schools, the content of the fable would be somewhat familiar so it would not have been entirely transformational for them. However, as teacher candidates currently enrolled in university, they are very much in the learning phase of their

careers and they are seeking answers to their own questions as they solidify their own personal philosophies of education.

The teacher candidates with moderate experience felt that *The Foal and the Ranch* would be most effective to combat ignorance and promote discussion between different groups of educational stakeholders. Based on their experiences, they felt that policy-makers were unaware of how things really play out in a classroom. They thought parents were largely ignorant of the (low) level of achievement of most students as well as the origin of many unpopular policies (the Ministry of Education). Finally, they believed that teachers and educational associates were often under-trained to accomplish the objectives that were put before them. Group “A” said that the fable would help rectify much of the existing ignorance among stakeholders, and believed that the greatest value of *The Foal and the Ranch* would be to bring interested parties from different perspectives together to brainstorm solutions to educational issues.

Participants with little experience. The parents who comprised group “C” had the least experience with being a formal educator, and the least knowledge of the inner workings of the educational system. It was this group who felt that they had been transformed the most. On a scale of one to 10, group “C” rated their own personal transformation an average of nine. These parents felt that *The Foal and the Ranch* validated unspoken concerns they had had regarding the schools their children attended. This enlightenment, however, did not necessarily yield good feelings as some parents felt frustrated with the educational system and overwhelmed by what they felt it would take to address its shortcomings. It is worth noting that the participant from group “B” (experienced educators) that had the least teaching experience felt the most transformation in that group. This supports the theory that perceived transformation and educational experience are inversely related.

The group “C” parents felt that *The Foal and the Ranch* would be best utilized among parents and students. Personal experiences had made parents cynical and they believed that if any positive change were to come to the educational system, it would come through a grassroots effort on the part of parents and students. Only through the pressure of a mass number of people did this group think that policy-makers would make the changes necessary to improve the school system. Even with public pressure, participants varied greatly in the degree of optimism that positive change was going occur any time soon. Overall, they felt grateful that they would no

longer be forced to deal with the educational system as their children were approaching graduation.

Research Question Two

The second research question this study sought to answer was:

2. What levels of dialogue are displayed as participants offer their observations, perceptions, and recommendations in response to reading and collectively interacting with a selected fable?

Discussion in all three groups was flowing, focussed, and continual. All participants were engaged and appeared to genuinely listen to the comments and perspectives of all the participants in their groups. Based on Bloom's taxonomy of affective learning, all three groups thoroughly engaged in affective learning at the lower three levels of receiving, responding, and valuing: what I categorized as meaningful dialogue. Group "A" was the only group that displayed noteworthy examples of productive dialogue at the higher two higher levels of organization and characterization.

After reviewing the data along with the criteria for determining the levels of dialogue, it should not be surprising that dialogue rarely went beyond valuing. Because the members of each group hailed from backgrounds with regards to their educational experience that were somewhat alike, they held similar perspectives as other group members. Also, participants were asked to discuss the fable and its usefulness, not to try to solve the problems addressed within its story. Because of these two factors, participants did not have much opportunity to integrate the perspectives of others, make judgements, or create, in the context of their dialogue. For these reasons, I would broadly categorize most of the dialogues in this study as meaningful, but not productive.

There were, however, many indications that more heterogeneous groupings would have led to much more opportunity for higher levels of affective learning. All three groups seemed to value the safe environment of initially discussing the fable with relatively like-minded individuals in a small group setting. Although experienced educators believed change would come from the top and parents thought that change would come from a grassroots movement, all three groups believed that it was the dialogue between groups that would be the most beneficial. All participants thought that *The Foal and the Ranch* would be a valuable tool to bring these inter-group discussions among stakeholders into fruition.

Implications of the Study for Theory

This dissertation was built on numerous theories including willful blindness, fallacious arguments, and numerous breakdowns in logic. These theories were largely incorporated into the writing of *The Foal and the Ranch* and provided readers with relatable analogies to the educational system. Previous authors have also put forth theories that the humanities can transform readers and function as a bridge, as a mirror, and as a window. They maintained that individual meaning is made as one interacts with literature and others around a piece of literature. The findings from this study confirm these existing theories and bolster the idea that alternative ways of knowing, storytelling, and moral imagination can lead to personal transformation and more meaningful dialogue.

Humanities as Instruments of Transformation

As might have been predicted by Galda (1998), the primarily aesthetic stance readers assumed while reading *The Foal and the Ranch* helped guide participants as they made meaning of the fable. Parents especially seemed to internalize what they had read and used the examples in the fable to articulate the feelings they had previously struggled to understand and to voice. While *The Foal and the Ranch* seemed to have more of an internal impact on new educators than it did on experienced educators, both groups shared the meanings they had created as they discussed the stories from the fable and compared them with similar examples from their own personal and professional lives. Although the range of perceived transformation was substantial between participants, all stakeholders who participated in this study indicated the enormous value of having a common context in which to address educational issues.

The ability of the humanities to initiate personal change is a powerful tool that cannot be overlooked. While bribery, coercion, or other forms of external motivations may induce temporary change for an individual; internal change only comes from a personal transformation. Perhaps because the reader is allowed to lower his or her defences as they experience and ponder fictional events, they are safe to reconsider their own beliefs and actions and willingly make the changes they feel are right. These changes indicate authentic transformation and are the kind of changes most likely to endure and to outwardly manifest. It remains to be seen if the participants who indicated a high level of perceived transformation actually show this outward manifestation.

Humanities as a Bridge, Mirror, and Window

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, the humanities (writ large) were described as a bridge that can lead to the discovery of one's self and to understanding others. Similarly, Galda (1998) viewed the role of the humanities as an instrument that takes on the role of both a mirror into the life of the reader as well as a window into the lives of others. Throughout the discussions in each group, references were made to how *The Foal and Ranch* accomplished the dual functions of a mirror and a window. One participant was clearly looking into mirror when she said, "As I read the fable, I thought of students I had taught . . . of how I had failed them." Seeing the book more as a window, one participant said,

There are so many examples – several different things from each chapter. The bullying stuff, the horse getting beaten because he thought a stall was a stable . . . there so many things, I wanted to write them all down. It's really good. I will take a lot of things from this book. I think the book is real eye-opener.

Whether viewed as a bridge, a mirror, or a window; the fable clearly functioned in these roles for most, if not all, of the participants.

As a mirror, anyone who considers themselves an educator can use instruments of the humanities to reflect a person's image back onto them so the person can see themselves in a new way. By using a parable or other humanity, a reader's defenses are lowered and he or she can see him or herself without many of the previous biases or blind spots that previously hindered an accurate self-assessment. This is an inoffensive technique as it is the readers themselves who provides the self-judgements and decide what changes ought to be made. Rather than lectures, haranguing or sermonizing, it would seem that many people respond much more positively to the humanities where they can see themselves more clearly and make their own internal changes.

The humanities may also be effective to reduce criticizing and faultfinding as they can serve as a window to the worlds of other people. It was obvious from this study that the fable allowed participants to see the educational system from the perspective of other stakeholders and that this new viewpoint caused them to reconsider some of their beliefs. Just as the fable helped parents understand administrators and teachers understand gifted students, the humanities can provide a medium through which a person's viewpoint is changed. While the use of the humanities to provide a new perspective holds

implications well beyond the field of education, the benefits in the educational realm are obvious. As stakeholders see the world through the eyes of another, empathy grows and the complexities of the educational system can be addressed with increased understanding of the wants, needs, and limitations of everyone involved.

Reader-Response Theory

Another theory underlying this study corresponded to Rosenblatt's (1995) reader-response theory. As Galda (1998) said, aesthetic reading allows readers a "lived through experience" in a fictional setting that allows them to learn more about themselves and others (p.2). The theories espoused by Rosenblatt (1995) and Galda (1998) put forward that discussions about stories often trigger personal recollections of related experiences as readers make emotional connections with the text and each other. This was corroborated many times throughout the study, including the following exchange by participants in group "B":

Participant 1: [*The Foal and the Ranch*] is a good read. It gives a common parlance to people who don't want to earn a Bachelor of Education, let alone a PhD in Education.

This gives a common parlance that anybody from any background can discuss.

Participant 2: "And safety to be able to discuss it without tying it to things."

Participant 3: "Yes, we brought in individual experiences in this setting because we're comfortable doing it but you certainly wouldn't have to, right?"

Participant 2: "No, and you can bring it from your own experiences."

Participant 3: "That's what it does; it connects to your own experiences."

Through the above comments and subsequent discussion, participants connected more with themselves as well as with others as they created their own meaning from the fable. Participants in this study showed a wide range of emotions from excitement to anger, joyfulness to remorse, and empowerment to feeling overwhelmed. Following these emotional responses were more pragmatic responses as some participants pondered the next logical steps that should be taken. Participants discussed how the fable might best be used to help improve education, and questions were asked: *What have we learned?* And, *where do we go from here?* These findings tend to corroborate the reader-response theory that the impact of literature is maximized when a reader has an emotional connection through an aesthetic stance prior to assuming an efferent stance.

Storytelling, Alternative Ways of Knowing, and Moral Imagination

The findings from this study seem to indicate that regardless of educational level or educational background, readers responded to the use of storytelling as a viable alternative way of knowing. For example, the experienced educators who were somewhat familiar with the real-life policies behind the incidents in the fable appreciated the emotional connection with the characters. Conversely, the parents who seemed familiar with the pain felt by the characters in the fable appreciated the understanding of why the educational system operates the way it does. This opportunity to view the educational system from a different perspective seemed to propel participants to utilize their moral imagination as they pondered the complexities of what they had read and experienced. As will be addressed below under *Implications for Further Research*, what remains to be seen is if this new awareness leads to any outward changes in people, policies, or educational outcomes.

Limitations of the Humanities

One final theory from Chapter Two that should be addressed is the limitations of the humanities. It was said that while the prospective for critical thinking would be enhanced through the humanities, there is no guarantee that people will put these skills to use (Viljoen, 2008; Monday, 2012). Similarly, the power of moral imagination was limited by the propensity of people to employ it (Patten, 2004; Somerville, 2006). The teacher candidates (group “A”) and parents (group “C”) clearly began the process of critical thinking and moral imagination through their many questions and ponderings; it is unknown at this time if these reflections will lead to any permanent changes in their thinking or any other positive outcomes. Determining if personal transformation and increased dialogue actually leads to better educational outcomes will also be addressed under *Implications for Further Research*.

Implications for Policy

This project began with my own observation that existing educational policies often did not match school practice. Further, there seemed to be a lack of conversation among educational stakeholders as to how these inconsistencies could be addressed. The findings from this study appreciably exhibited that educators are often aware of the shortcomings of educational practices but seemed to be somewhat hardened to the implications of these discrepancies. New teachers also acknowledged the “disconnect” between what is expected of them and what is provided to them in the way of training and resources. This has led to these teachers feeling frustrated and

powerless to simultaneously satisfy the needs of students, parents, administration, the Ministry, and their own life and family. Parents were angry with the current state of education and felt overwhelmed and largely pessimistic about the prospect of positive change occurring in schools in the foreseeable future.

The teachers in this study responded much the same as me and other teachers with whom I have talked in my career. Many teachers are frustrated as they feel forced to teach to the lowest common denominator and watch as more advanced students sit idle in a sea of boredom and neglect. The paradoxes and fallacious thinking in policy and practice addressed in this dissertation must be overcome as the inconsistencies they create are causing obvious damage to many students and parents. The noticeable intensification of emotion seemed to correspond to the stakeholder's relational proximity to students: administrators showed the least emotion, teacher candidates displayed moderate emotion, and parents exhibited great emotion. These findings correspond with the assertion made in Chapter Two that the further from the practical application of policies, the easier it is to ignore, overlook, or justify ambiguous language and to ignore its consequences (Dörner, 1996; Heffernan, 2011). What educators may see as annoyances can be devastating to children and families trapped in the confines of a compulsory education system that does not deliver on the promises made by policy makers. As one parent put it, "If education can be given some perspective, maybe it wouldn't be so harmful." The deep emotional responses from educational stakeholders indicate that there is a need for dialogue, understanding, and change.

The implications of this dissertation for policy find their origin in Chapters Two and Four where the toolkit for overcoming fallacious thinking and breakdowns in language are described and utilized. It is vital that stakeholders have the tools to identify and overcome flawed logic and other critical constructs of language that lead to paradoxes in education. Even if these paradoxes go unrecognized or unchallenged, the consequences do not go unnoticed. This study showed the supreme frustration among teacher candidates as well as the deep pain of parents as they and their children are forced to live within systemic contradictions. If effective policies are going to be written and implemented, it is in the best interest of educational stakeholders to have a clear understanding of the objectives, resources, and limitations of the educational system.

Implications for Practice

The data in this study indicate that the humanities, as represented by the fable, can be used to encourage readers to reflect and possibly be transformed by a fable. Participant behaviour indicated a powerful benefit of the humanities as stories that are not only remembered, but feelings and connections between ideas seemed to be enhanced by discussion. Additionally, the humanities are an effective means to open up a dialogue between interested parties. This creates at least a two-fold implication for practice.

First, as was shown in this dissertation, there is a need for meaningful dialogue concerning current educational policies and practices. As suggested by participants in each group, it would be a valuable exercise to re-create this study and then bring stakeholders who represent different educational perspectives together on a regular basis. These ongoing discussions between policy-makers, administrators, teachers, parents, and students would encourage understanding and empathy, and hopefully yield more congruent policies and practices and better student outcomes.

The second implication for practice is the advancement of using the humanities to teach lessons in and out of schools. With the proper artefact of the humanities, instruments such as fables, historical fiction novels, short stories, and other literature or music may entertain and inform learners through a more engaging and emotional experience than other mediums such as textbooks. As *The Foal and the Ranch* was to education, other literature could be written to help learners understand health care, the economy, politics, or one of many other lessons in the social sciences and beyond. Because many learners tend to prefer the humanities for learning, it is prudent for educators to utilize this medium whenever possible to teach or augment their lessons.

One final practical application for *The Foal and the Ranch* is to make it readily available to those involved with education so it can inform, transform, and aid in dialogue in the lives of individuals. My vision for this study (and beyond) was to provide a context from which stakeholders could talk to other stakeholders about educational policy in a realistic manner. For example, I foresee a parent and teacher (who have both read the fable) sitting down to discuss the special needs of the parent's gifted child. Using examples from the fable, the parent will be able to intelligently ask questions and recognize possible problems in the plan recommended by the teacher. I envision parents making comments like, *well, when they did that (proposed plan) in the book, the foal ended up segregated from the class most of the day, what do you think the trainer should have done differently to prevent segregation? Will my child's teacher employ the*

strategy you have just recommended? The teacher will then be in a position to discuss the situation of the foal and offer forward-looking solutions without having to admit, apologize, or defend why that exact situation happened in his or her class last year.

Similarly, I can see a teacher using the same strategy when discussing issues with his or her principal. The teacher might say, *I appreciate the intent of inclusive classrooms, but just like in the book, I quite often find that the needs of many of my students go unmet while I deal with a few high-maintenance students...if you were the instructor in the swimming lesson analogy in the fable, how would you have handled the situation?* This process could continue until a realistic solution is agreed upon that satisfies all parties and policies.

Ultimately, it is my hope that the fable will become a tool for advocacy for those who previously have not had a voice with which to speak to those in power. Parents frustrated with teachers, teachers frustrated with administrators, administrators frustrated with policy-makers, and policy-makers frustrated with voters, will have a tool to express their frustrations. Having the book as a common context, educators and policy makers will both be able to ask – and answer – questions more purposefully; and all parties, from the Ministry to the classroom level, will have a better understanding of the realities of public education. This broad understanding will not only enable stakeholders to focus on reality, it will encourage them to step out from behind whatever veil they may currently be behind – ignorance, fallacious arguments, rhetoric, misunderstanding of language, or willful blindness – and honestly confront the real issues in education. Exposing reality will likely cause discomfort among those responsible for public education, but until the plight of education is clearly exposed, meaningful dialogue is impossible.

Implications for Schools

The research conducted in this study revealed that most learners either preferred the fable to more institutional instruction methods such as textbooks or lectures, or they at least appreciated the fable as a supplement to these instruments. The implication for schools is that instruction and assessment methods should be broadened to more firmly embrace the authentic learning that is accomplished through these mediums. This may entail the use of such things as historical fiction and storytelling. Perhaps instead of teaching Aboriginal education, for example, Elders could be brought in to tell traditional stories to students. This type of experiential learning will require effort on the part of teachers and some flexibility in the

curriculum as it may become formulaic and lose much of its effectiveness through prescribed assessment and standardized learning outcomes.

Implications for Teacher Education

In Chapter Two, I quoted Monday (2012) who said that further research was necessary “to discover if humanities use in educational programs has efficacy in the preparation of educational leaders. . . . [And answer,] would individuals trained in this manner indicate that such preparation has value?” (p. 200). Findings from this study indicate that educational leaders trained using an instrument of the humanities unanimously found value in the medium. Teacher candidates indicated a strong preference for learning using a fable rather than textbooks and journal articles. Likely because their interest was piqued and they were actively engaged with the fable, their memories were enhanced and their creativity unlocked. After advocating that the use of the humanities be expanded in K – 12 education because it enhances learning, it would be logical that it also be further utilized in all levels of education. In my experience as a teacher candidate, I often witnessed professors lecturing for hours from the front of the classroom about the ineffective and outdated instructional strategy of the “sage on the stage.” Incongruent messages like this can only be avoided as those who instruct teacher candidates practice what they preach and use a variety of instructional methods – including those in the humanities. It is through emotion and storytelling that memory is enhanced and learning is nurtured; this is true regardless of if one is in kindergarten or in their fourth year of Education in university.

Implications for Further Research

The literature review in Chapter Two of this dissertation revealed a gap in the research investigating the usage of the humanities to educate, as well as a void in educational training as a result of a lack of the use of humanities in preparing leaders. This study adds to the body of research that promotes the use of the humanities in educating people and promoting dialogue. *The Foal and the Ranch* helped fill the void of instruments of the humanities which educators may use to help train future educational leaders. Participants felt that the happenings in the fable were relatable to their experiences in and with the educational system. This indicates that a relevant humanities piece combined with interested stakeholders may yield emotion-filled discussions and exuberant, meaningful dialogues among participants in other fields of study. It is still unknown if inspiring dialogue between stakeholders who are better informed will actually

yield long-term personal transformation or positive change in policies and practices. The questions of the long-term personal and policy implications will be areas for further research.

Before presenting the two avenues I foresee for further research, I will first offer my own reflections of this work. Beyond the use of the fable I created, I would like to remove myself from the research and re-create the process. It would be interesting to reproduce this study with a larger number of participants who come from across the Province, and who are not known to me. A project such as this would help validate the findings of this study and explore the extent to which my relationships may have influenced participants. Additionally, because it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove the biases of the researcher in a study such as this, I would welcome a repeat of this study by another researcher who had no involvement in the creation of the fable. While the researcher's bias would still be a consideration, he or she would bring a different perspective to the study and further explore if the fable itself was conducive to creating personal transformation in understanding educational issues and to examine the extent to which meaningful dialogue was created. Beyond re-creating this study with new participants and/or a new researcher, there are possibilities for future research building on this study.

I foresee future research pertaining to this study to go in one of two directions: depth and breadth. The direction I am most interested in for future research involves depth, as the next logical phase for this research is to continue where this study left off. This involves discovering if the insights felt by stakeholders after reading *The Foal and the Ranch* actually lead to personal transformation and/or policy changes. Once stakeholders have read the fable and discussed it in homogeneous groups, members from each group could be brought together to explore the extent to which the fable helps them further bridge the gaps that these discussion groups have revealed. As Atkinson (2013) advocated, such a change would take these discussions away from the expression of voice and toward authentic dialogue. These heterogeneous groups which represent the spectrum of educational stakeholders will be in the best position to collegially formulate policies that are mutually acceptable, affordable, and sustainable. This is what I would most like to see emerge as a result of this dissertation.

Discussions with my committee members also focussed on this pursuit of depth. Specifically, we wondered together, if *The Foal and the Ranch* can cause individual transformation of understanding and provoke meaningful dialogue, how could it be used to initiate positive change? Comments from participants in this study indicated a variety of

opinions on how change will manifest. Experienced educators thought that policy makers and administrators were the key to change. Parents believed that no change would happen until students and parents unified and demanded change so it is these groups that should first read the fable. Teacher candidates seemed to think that if students, parents, teachers, administration, board members, and policy makers all read the fable, positive change would come from the discussion between the groups. Interesting further research would be to test the theory of each of these three groups to determine which strategy would, in fact, be the most effective in producing change and to discover how best to engage members of each group.

Future research based on this dissertation may also branch out and provide more breadth to our understanding of the usefulness of the humanities. Using another artefact of the humanities, a researcher could replicate this study. Assuming the humanity provided an accurate analogy or representation of the topic matter, this process would accomplish the same two research objectives as this one: it would add to the research of using the humanities to educate, and the artefact that was produced would be a valuable tool for other educators in the same field who want to expand their use of the humanities in their instruction.

Conclusions

This dissertation was birthed from my perception that there was little meaningful dialogue among educational stakeholders with regards to certain educational issues. I suggest that much of the eroding confidence in Saskatchewan public schools (and beyond) that I have witnessed comes as a result of the discrepancy between public school policies and their practices, which cause confusion and apathy for students and parents, as well as educators. By creating a tool of the humanities – a fable – addressing various educational issues in a simple manner, and then having stakeholders read and discuss the tale, I sought to ascertain the extent to which this type of medium could engage educational stakeholders in transformative discussions on educational issues. To this end, I sought to answer two research questions:

1. To what extent do educational stakeholders perceive they were transformed by their experience reading and discussing a fable about educational issues?
2. What levels of dialogue are displayed as participants offer their observations, perceptions, and recommendations in response to reading and collectively interacting with a selected fable?

My research findings bolstered the opinions found in existing literature regarding the usefulness of the humanities in education. As Rosenblatt (1995) might have predicted, readers brought their own experiences to their reading of *The Foal and the Ranch*. These unique perspectives allowed readers to create their own meaning and then fashion a shared meaning from events in the fable as they interacted with each other based on what they had read and experienced.

Perceived personal transformation varied substantially and seemed to be inversely related to the previous experience participants had with the educational system. Those with the most experience delivering formal education felt the least transformed, while those with the least experience felt they had been transformed the most by reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch*. This finding corresponded with the assessment of cognitive learning which indicated that those with the most educational experience evidenced the least amount of cognitive learning.

The levels of dialogue within the groups were relatively uniform. According to Bloom's taxonomy for affective learning, while dialogue in each group was categorized as meaningful, it rarely exceeded that of valuing – seeking to understand the perspective of another. It is my belief that the higher levels of affective learning were rarely attained as a result of (a) Homogeneity of group members, and/or (b) The task of discussing the fable did not require higher levels of discourse. I am confident that stakeholder groups comprised of members representing different perspectives (policy-makers, administrators, teachers, parents, and students) and tasked with brainstorming solutions would provide ample opportunity for higher levels of dialogue. Conducting a study similar to this one but using heterogeneous groupings is a logical next step for future research in this area.

As I had felt there was an opportunity for meaningful dialogue to inspire positive change in the educational system, my goal was to see if my use of a fable as an instrument of the humanities could invoke meaningful dialogue among stakeholders. With this end in mind, I believed the course of action was:

- 1) Educate selected stakeholders on the current state of education;
- 2) Give these stakeholders a common context for discussion;
- 3) Bring these stakeholders together to discuss educational issues in an informed and realistic manner; and
- 4) Collegially create policies that are effective, affordable, and sustainable.

I believe this study clearly indicated that *The Foal and the Ranch* was a useful medium to educate stakeholders (step 1) and facilitate discussion (step 2); and this study provides a framework with which to bring stakeholders together (step 3) to create new policies that help achieve better educational outcomes (step 4). In the education of our children, the stakes are high. Because the humanities can be effective tools for education and to promote productive dialogue, it would be prudent for educators in the Province to further utilize artefacts of the humanities. Beyond this, exemplars of the humanities, such as *The Foal and the Ranch*, can be employed to enlighten educational stakeholders and promote meaningful dialogue on educational issues.

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Appendix A: Ethics Application

For administrative use only
File Number: _____ Date received: _____



Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review

Evaluating Applications

The matters of greatest concern to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) are the issues of informed consent of participants, voluntary participation, protection of individual privacy (confidentiality and anonymity), and safeguarding participants from any harmful results due to participation or non-participation in the proposed investigation or research project. Our evaluation of an application is based on the degree to which each of these concerns are satisfied; when filling out the application, researchers are urged to consider these points, and to explain to the Beh-REB the steps they will take to address the concerns. Researchers are also urged to consult the [Tri-Council Policy Statement 2](#) for more information and guidance.

The Beh-REB acknowledges the variety of paradigms and methodologies currently available to researchers, and that each of these paradigms entails its own particular ethical issues. Thus, there may be more than one way to address an ethical issue. Researchers should feel free to suggest alternative approaches or to explain why a particular requirement is not appropriate in the context of a given project.

****All text boxes will expand once <Enter> is selected or the cursor moves to the next section.****

PART 1: IDENTIFICATION	
1.1	Project Title GN 1.1
1.2	Principal Investigator GN 1.2 Full Name: Dr. Keith Walker Mailing Address: University of Saskatchewan Email: keith.walker@usask.ca Phone: (306) 716-4835 NSID number (U of S faculty only): KDW744
1.3	University/Institutional Affiliation of Principal Investigator GN 1.3 Position: Professor Department: Educational Administration & JSGSPP, U of S Division: Education & JSGSPP
1.4	If this is a student/graduate/resident project, please provide the following information: GN 1.4 a) Student Name(s) and Student ID or NSID (s): Joel Curtis Hall; JCH612 b) Supervisor Name:
1.5	Project Personnel (include graduates/post graduates/residents): GN 1.5 <input type="button" value="Add Personnel"/> <input type="button" value="Remove Last"/> Full Name: Project Position/Role: University/Institutional Affiliation: Email: Phone:
1.6	Primary Contact Person for Correspondence (if different than Section 1.2) GN 1.6 Full Name: Mailing Address: Email: Phone:

1.7	Research Site(s) where project will be carried out: Within Canada
1.8	1.8.1 Proposed Project Period: GN 1.8 From (MM/DD/YY) 11/1/2013 To (MM/DD/YY) 03/1/2014
1.9	<p>1.9.1 Has this project applied for and/or received ethical approval from any other Research Ethics Board? Will you be seeking REB approval through the Sask. ethics harmonization process? GN 1.9</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>1.9.2 Please be advised that approvals may need to be sought if you are collecting data from schools, within health regions and may be required from other organizations, agencies, or community groups. Will you be contacting potential participants or collecting data from any such organizations? GN 1.9.2</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
1.10	1.10.1 Status of Funds: GN 1.10 <input type="checkbox"/> Awarded <input type="checkbox"/> Pending <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unfunded

PART 2: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

2.1	<p>2.1.1 Is there any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest (any personal or financial interest in the conduct or outcome of this project)? GN 2.1</p> <p>2.1.2 Will any of the researcher(s), members of the research team and/or their immediate family members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive personal benefits in connection with this project over and above the direct costs of conducting the project, such as remuneration or employment? Receive significant payments of other sorts from the sponsor such as grants, compensation in the form of equipment or supplies or retainers for ongoing consultation and honoraria? Have a non-financial relationship with a sponsor (such as unpaid consultant, board membership, advisor or other non-financial interest)? Have any direct involvement with the sponsor such as stock ownership, stock options or board membership. Hold patents, trademarks, copyrights, licensing agreements or intellectual property rights linked in any way to this project or the sponsor? Have any other relationship, financial or non-financial, that if not disclosed, could be construed as a conflict of interest? <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
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PART 3: BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECT

3.1	<p>Briefly describe the project, its objectives and potential significance (250-500 words): GN 3.1</p> <p>Policy concerning public education contains numerous paradoxes, fallacies, and moral dilemmas. Topics such as inclusion, differentiated instruction, special needs, gifted education, Aboriginal education, EAL education, and standardized testing; all cause policy-makers to consider justice, fairness, and equity in the education of our youth. In Saskatchewan, policy makers have responded by espousing a system in which ALL students will meet their full potential.</p> <p>Stating the purpose of education to be ALL children reaching their full potential has at least five inherent problems:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Accurately measuring potential. 2) Potential is not fixed. 3) Value judgments of certain potentials (ie. not all potentials are deemed to be good - policies make no differentiation). 4) Competing potentials (A child may have potential for 'A' or 'B', but not 'A' AND 'B' - policies do not acknowledge this limitation). 5) Resources are limited. <p>Compounding the problem of creating a just, fair, and equitable system; documents such as the "Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)" and the Saskatchewan "Education Act (1995)" seem to contradict themselves. The Charter clearly states that no citizen may be discriminated against, and the Education Act promises an appropriate education for all children, and yet both allow discrimination against a specific group - gifted students.</p> <p>My project will bring these issues to the forefront using a style that has been employed for thousands of years - the fable. Throughout history, stories have been used to enlighten and teach. Centuries ago, story-tellers like Aesop and Jesus used fables and parables to reveal the human condition and impart wisdom. More recently, business authors such as Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, personal finance authors such as Robert Kiyosaki and David Chilton, religious authors such as C.S. Lewis and Brian McLaren, and political authors such as George Orwell; have used stories to communicate sometimes complicated principles in easy-to-understand language.</p>
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	<p>The authors listed above (and many others) have taken potentially complicated issues and simplified them in a way that allows most people to be included in the conversation in their respective fields. My project will be a story about topical educational issues and policies told through fictional animal characters (specifically, horses), as they describe their training experiences. As previous authors have done for business, personal finance, religion, and politics; I intend to give people impacted by public education a context through which educational issues may be discussed in an inclusive and non-threatening environment.</p> <p>As a part of my research, and hopefully beyond, the fable will engage educators at various levels (teachers, principals, superintendents, etc.) in discussions about the issues contained in the book. Beyond simply igniting debate about policy, using the humanities to teach will also provoke dialogue about alternative ways of knowing and using fables to learn.</p> <p>In addition, the questions posed to the participants, as well as comments and feedback from the participants, will inform the creation of a study guide which will accompany the fable. The intent of the study guide is to provide ongoing use of the fable beyond the duration of this project. Ultimately, this project - the fable and the study guide - will be designed to provide an ongoing context and language through which educational policy-makers and stakeholders can critically examine and discuss some of the foundational premises of education.</p>												
3.2	<p>Provide a description of research design and methods to be used: GN 3.2</p> <p>In this qualitative study, research participants will be chosen from stakeholders in the field of education. This may include teachers, school administrators, divisional administrators, parents, graduate and undergraduate students, as well as Ministry of Education representatives. All participants will be adults over the age of 18.</p> <p>Participants will be provided with open-ended questions to initiate discussion on 1) the content of the fable; and 2) the medium of using a fable. The researcher will either observe and take note of examples participant approval and disapproval of both content and medium, or, the participants will provide a written content analysis of their reflections on the fable.</p>												
3.3	<p>Provide details regarding the duration and location of data collection event(s): GN 3.3</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participant Observation</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Individual Interviews</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group Interview</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Non-invasive physical measurements</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Video/audio recording</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Secondary use of data or analysis of existing data</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Home Visits</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Ethnography</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Written reflections</td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participant Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Interviews	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group Interview	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-invasive physical measurements	<input type="checkbox"/> Video/audio recording	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary use of data or analysis of existing data	<input type="checkbox"/> Home Visits	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnography	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Written reflections	
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Written reflections													

PART 4: PROJECT DETAILS	
4.1	<p>4.1.1 Will you have any internet-based interaction with participants? GN 4.1</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.2	<p>4.2.1 Will your research involve Aboriginal Peoples including First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples? GN 4.2</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.3	<p>4.3.1 Will the project involve community-based participatory research? GN 4.3</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.4	<p>Will deception of any kind be necessary in this project? GN 4.4</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.5	<p>Indicate how the participants will be debriefed following their participation (if applicable), and describe how the information on the results of the research will be made available to participants once the study has ended. Debriefing is particularly important if deception has been used. GN 4.5</p> <p>Participants in the study will be provided with the notes and researcher conclusions from the group discussions. Participants will also be invited to participate further in a focus group to further discuss specific topics and/or themes. Focus groups will be optional but will provide additional opportunity for participants to change or clarify their positions. At any point, participants may choose to opt out of participation in this project.</p> <p>Additionally, participants may access results of the study through resulting written work (scholarly journals, books, etc).</p>
4.6	<p>Will participants be compensated? GN 4.6</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>

4.7	<p>4.7.1 Will participants be anonymous in the data gathering phase of the study? (Anonymous means that no link can be established between the participant and the research - no one including the researcher knows who has participated in the research):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
	<p>4.7.2 Will the confidentiality of participants and their data be protected? (Confidentiality means that no link can be established between the collected information and the participant's identity)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
	<p>4.7.3 If yes, are there any limits to confidentiality:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Limits due to the nature of group activities (e.g. focus groups): the researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Limits due to context: individual participants could be identified because of the nature or size of the sample or because of their relationship with the researcher.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Limits due to selection: procedures for recruiting or selecting participants may compromise the confidentiality of participants (e.g. participants are referred to the study by a person outside the research team)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>

PART 5: ESTIMATION OF RISKS AND BENEFITS	
5.1	<p>5.1.1 Do you consider this project to be: GN 5.1</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minimal Risk <input type="checkbox"/> Above Minimal Risk</p>
	<p>5.1.2 Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following:</p> <p>Risk of psychological or emotional harm or discomfort (e.g. trauma, anxiety, stress) no</p> <p>Legal repercussions for participating in the study(e.g. possibility of being sued, charged with criminal activity, disclosure of past or future criminal activities, etc.) no</p> <p>Social repercussions (e.g. ostracized, being negatively judged by peers or employer, fired from your job) no</p> <p>Risk of physical harm or discomfort (e.g. falling, muscle pain, tiredness, weakness, nausea) no</p>
	<p>5.1.3 Describe how the risk will be managed (including an explanation as to why an alternative approached could not be used). If appropriate, identify any resources, e.g. physician or counselor, to which participants can be referred. GN 5.1.3</p> <p>This study will have minimal risk for participants as it is largely observational and the focus of discussion and written work will be on a fictitious story. All participants will be consenting adults who are competent and fully aware of the nature and purpose of the study. The names of individuals will not be used. Professional titles of participants will be used only in instances for which it would be required for clarification or understanding of specific perspectives. That said, titles and any other potential identifiers may only be used in the research study and will not appear in follow-up publications (i.e. study guide). Participants may choose to not be identified by title. As much as possible, credit for input will be general - attributed to a group of educators such as teachers, administrators, school division personnel, etc.</p>
	<p>5.1.4 If above minimal risk, what are the likely benefits of the research to the researcher, participant, the research community and society that would justify asking participants to participate? GN 5.1.4</p>

PART 6: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT	
6.1	<p>Describe the participants and the criteria for their inclusion or exclusion. Indicate the number of participants and a brief rationale for the intended number of participants: GN 6.1</p> <p>The participants will be chosen from stakeholders in the educational field. This may include teachers, school or divisional administrators, representatives from the Ministry of Education, parents, graduate students in educational fields, or undergrad students in the Department of Education. People under 18 will not be included in this study. In order to allow participants opportunity to voice their opinions and comments while balancing the need for a multiple of perspectives, discussion groups will be comprised of three to eight participants. There will be one to three discussion groups for a total of three to 24 participants.</p>

	For written reflections, there will be as many as 200 participants as a larger number will allow for a greater opportunity to uncover themes and trends.
6.2	<p>6.2.1 Provide a detailed description of the method of recruitment. GN 6.2 The researcher will contact the prospect (in person, by email, or phone) and describe: 1) Who I am and who I represent (U of S); 2) The nature of the study; 3) Why they were chosen; and 4) What their responsibilities as a participant would be. If they are willing to consider participation, I will send out a letter of consent and arrange a meeting time.</p> <p>6.2.2 How will prospective participants be identified? Prospects will be identified based on their involvement in education. This may include teachers, administrators, policy-makers, parents, university graduate and/or undergraduate students, or others directly involved in education in Saskatchewan.</p> <p>6.2.3 Who will contact prospective participants? Describe the source of the contact information, how they will be contacted and as applicable, who originally collected the contact information. Ensure any letters of initial contact or other recruitment materials are attached, e.g. advertisements, flyers, telephone script, etc. The researcher will contact prospective participants. All prospects will be contacted in person, by email, or by phone. All contact information will be collected through prior knowledge or public sources such as company or school websites.</p>
6.3	In cases where the research involves special or vulnerable populations, distinct cultural groups, or in cases where the research is above minimal risk, the researcher should describe their experience or training in working with the population. If none of these criteria apply, this section may be omitted. GN 6.3 N/A
6.4	Where relevant, please explain any relationship (pre-existing, current or expected to have) between the researcher(s) and the researched (e.g. instructor-student, manager-employee, co-workers, family members/intimate relationships, etc). Please pay special attention to relationships in which there may be a power differential. Describe any safeguards and procedures to prevent possible undue influence, coercion or inducement. GN 6.4 Participants may be former co-workers or fellow grad students. At this time, the researcher has no professional relationships with any potential participants that could potentially create a power differential.

PART 7: CONSENT PROCESS

	Describe the process that will be used to obtain informed consent. Please note that it is the content of the consent, not the format that is important. If the research involves collection of personally identifiable information from a research participant or extraction of personally identifiable information from an existing database, please describe how consent from the individuals or authorization from the data custodian will be obtained. If there will be no written consent, please provide a rationale for oral or implied consent (e.g., cultural appropriateness, online questionnaire, etc.) and explain how consent will be recorded.
7.1	<p>7.1.1 Describe the consent process. GN 7.1 After agreeing to consider participating in this study, prospective participants will be provided with a consent form to sign. Following this written consent, participants will be asked to renew their consent when presented with the notes and conclusions from the group discussions in which they participated (if applicable). Additionally, if the participant chooses to join a focus group following the group discussion, the researcher will also ask for consent for the participant to be included in the notes and conclusions from the focus group.</p> <p>7.1.2 Who will ask for consent? The researcher will ask for consent.</p> <p>7.1.3 Where, and under what circumstances will consent be obtained? Consent will be ongoing throughout the study. Initial consent will be the signed consent form; following the initial consent, participants will be asked to verbally consent to notes from group discussions and any focus groups in which they choose to participate.</p> <p>7.1.4 Describe any situation in which the renewal of consent for this research might be appropriate and how this would take place (e.g. longitudinal studies, multiple data collection events, etc.). If participants choose to participate in focus groups following general group discussions, they will be asked to renew their consent.</p>
7.2	If any or all of the participants are children and/or are not competent to consent, describe the process by which capacity/competency will be assessed, the proposed alternate source of consent - including any permission/information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent - as well as the assent process for participants. GN 7.2 N/A - all participants will be adults who are competent to consent.

7.3	Describe your plans for providing project results to the participant? GN 7.3 Following group discussions and any focus groups in which a participant was involved, the participant will be provided with the notes and summaries from the meetings. At the conclusion of the study, participants will be provided access the final version of the dissertation.
7.4	How and when are participants informed of the right to withdraw? What procedures will be followed for participants who wish to withdraw at any point during the study? GN 7.4 Participants will be provided with the option to withdraw at any time throughout the study at which time any contributions made by the participant will be destroyed.

PART 8: DATA SECURITY AND STORAGE

Indicate the procedures you plan to implement to safeguard and store the data. Identify the person who will be assuming responsibility for data storage (University regulations require the researcher or the supervisor, in the case of student research, to securely store the data at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years upon the completion of the study - (Procedures for Stewardship of Research Records at the University of Saskatchewan 2010.)

8.1	Who will conduct the data collection? GN 8.1 The researcher - Joel Hall (jch612)
8.2	Who will have access to the original data of the study? GN 8.2 Only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Keith Walker.
8.3	<p>How will confidentiality of original data be maintained as well as preserving or destroying data after the research is completed. For all data (e.g. paper records, audio or visual recordings, electronic recordings), indicate the: GN 8.3</p> <p>8.3.1 Person responsible for data storage: Upon completion of the study, all collected data will be retained by my supervisor, Dr. Keith Walker of the Department of Educational Administration, according to the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. After the study is complete, data will be stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. After this period of time, the data will be destroyed.</p> <p>8.3.2 Data security during transportation from collection site: All material will be stored on my personal laptop computer and will be password protected with the password being known to only myself. In addition, all electronic data will be stored on a secure cabinet with the U of S.</p> <p>8.3.3 Means and location of storage (e.g. a locked filing cabinet, password protected computer files, encryption): All information will be kept electronically on my personal laptop which will be password protected and, when not in use, will be kept exclusively in my home office. In addition, all electronic data will be stored on a secure cabinet with the U of S.</p> <p>8.3.4 Time duration of storage (Must be > 5 Years): After the study is complete, data will be stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. In addition, all electronic data will be stored on a secure cabinet with the U of S. After this period of time, the data will be destroyed/deleted.</p> <p>8.3.5 Final disposition (archive, shredding, electronic file deletion): Any and all written documents will be shredded and electronic versions will be deleted.</p>
8.4	<p>Indicate how the data collected is intended to be used (thesis, journal articles, conference presentation, media, etc). GN 8.4</p> <p>The data collected will be for dissertation work. The recommendations from this research will be used in journal articles, conference presentations and written material (ie. books, study guide).</p>

**PART 9: Declaration by Principal Investigator
(or Supervisor for student projects)**

Project Title

- I confirm that the information provided in this application is complete and correct.
- I accept responsibility for the ethical conduct of this project and for the protection of the rights and welfare of the human participants who are directly or indirectly involved in this project.
- I will comply with all policies and guidelines of the University and Health Region/affiliated institutions where this project will be conducted, as well as with all applicable federal and provincial laws regarding the protection of human participants in research.
- I will ensure that project personnel are qualified, appropriately trained and will adhere to the provisions of the REB-approved application.
- I certify that any significant changes to the project, including the proposed method, consent process or recruitment procedures, will be reported to the Research Ethics Board for consideration in advance of its implementation.
- I certify that a status report will be submitted to the Research Ethics Board for consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion.
- If personal health information is requested, I assure that it is the minimum necessary to meet the research objective and will not be reused or disclosed to any parties other than those described in the REB-approved application, except as required by law.
- I confirm that adequate resources to protect participants (i.e., personnel, funding, time, equipment and space) are in place.
- I understand that if the contract or grant related to this research project is being reviewed by the University or Health Region, a copy of the ethics application inclusive of the consent document(s), may be forwarded to the person responsible for the review of the contract or grant.
- I understand that if the project involves Health Region resources or facilities, a copy of the ethics application may be forwarded to the Health Region research coordinator to facilitate operational approval.

Signature of Principal Investigator and/or
Supervisor

Printed Name of Principal Investigator and/or
Supervisor

Date (MM/DD/YY)

Signature of Student Investigator

Printed Name of Student Investigator

Date (MM/DD/YY)

Department Head (UofS and RQHR only) : The signature/approval of the Department/Administrative Unit acknowledges that he/ she is aware of and supports the research activity described in the proposal.

Signature of Department Head

Printed Name of Department Head

Date (MM/DD/YY)

SECTION 10: APPENDICES GN 10		
Document	Included?	Description
Recruit Material(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Recruitment Poster/Telephone & Email Script
Letter (s) of Initial Contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Initial contact sheet
Consent Form(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Participant Consent Form - General Participant Consent Form - Discussion Groups Participant Consent Form - Focus Groups Participant Consent Form - Written Response
Assent Form(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
Research Tool(s) (e.g. Questionnaires, focus group guides, interview scripts, etc.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Discussion Questions
Transcript Release Form(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
RQHR Operational/Departmental Approval Form	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	

Appendix B: Affective Learning Rubric

Affective Domain	Corresponding Verbs	Focussing Questions
Characterization	Internalize, review, conclude, resolve, judge	Did participant seem to internalize the perspective of another?
Organization	Examine, clarify, systematize, create, integrate	Did participant integrate the perspective of another?
Valuing	Believe, seek, justify, respect, search, persuade	Did participant seek understanding?
Responding	Conform, allow, cooperate, contribute, enjoy, satisfy	Did participant contribute to the discussion?
Receiving	Feel, sense, capture, experience, pursue, attend, perceive	Did participant attend to the discussion (did they listen to others)?

Appendix C: Cognitive Learning Rubric

Level of Thinking	Corresponding Verbs	Focusing Questions
Creating	generate, develop, construct, organize, propose, formulate	Did participant formulate their own solution for an issue presented in the fable?
Evaluating	argue, decide, validate, appraise, evaluate, judge, measure, rank, criticize, rate, select, consider	Did participant consider different viewpoints presented in the fable?
Analyzing	distinguish, contrast, scrutinize, dissect, separate, discriminate, analyze, examine, survey	Did participant distinguish different elements contributing to the events in the fable?
Applying	employ, execute, implement, practice, calculate, show, demonstrate, translate, illustrate, model	Did participant demonstrate understanding of fable?
Understanding	relate, interpret, classify, summarize, discuss, describe, explain, conclude, compare/contrast	Did participant reasonably interpret contents of fable?
Remembering	memorize, define, recite, recall, cite, count, draw, recall, list, name, record, repeat	Did participant recall contents of fable?

Appendix D: Recruitment Poster/Telephone & Email Script

Department of Educational Administration

University of Saskatchewan



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
the use of humanities for initiating discussions concerning educational policies.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to:

- (1) Read a fictional story
- (2) Participate in a discussion group which talks over the content of the story as well as the usefulness of using a story to initiate discussion.

Your participation would involve reading a fable (2 – 4 hours) and ONE session,
lasting approximately 90 minutes.

Refreshments will be provided during discussion sessions.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:

(Joel Hall)

(Educational Administration)

at

306-203-0137

Email: joel.hall@usask.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received approval
through, the Research Ethics Office, University of Saskatchewan.



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Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Exploring the Use of the Humanities Towards Transformative Dialogue on Educational Issues.

Researcher(s): Joel Hall, Ph.D. candidate, Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 249-4932, joel.hall@usask.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Keith Walker, Educational Administration, (306) 716-4832, keith.walker@usask.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

- The purpose of this study is to use the humanities to initiate transformational discussion and informed dialogue among educational stakeholders.

Procedures:

- Participants will be required to:
 - 1) Read a fable provided by the researcher (2 to 4 hours).

Followed by either:

- a) Meeting with the researcher in a small group and discuss the content of the fable as well as the effectiveness of using a fable to facilitate discussion about educational issues (2 hours). ****this discussion will be recorded (audio only)**

Or,

- b) Provide written reflections concerning the fable.
- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

Potential Risks:

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.
- If applicable, following group meeting, you will be provided with notes and summaries from group meeting for your consent.
- If you desire further opportunity to clarify or expand on any aspect of the discussion, you will be invited to participate in a focus group.

Potential Benefits:

- All participants will be those with an interest in public education. This research will begin to open dialogue on current educational issues as well as help create a resource for future, more broad, use.

Confidentiality:

- No names will be used in the written notes or summaries from meetings.
- Professional titles (principal, teacher, superintendent, etc.) may be used in research project if it is deemed necessary to provide a distinct or differing perspective.
- The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.
- Because the participants for this research project have been selected from a small group of people, many of whom are known to each other; it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said.
- Storage of Data:
 - Upon completion of the study, all collected data will be retained by my supervisor, Dr. Keith Walker of the Department of Educational Administration, according to the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. After the study is complete, data will be stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. After this period of time, the data will be destroyed.

Right to Withdraw:

- Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Should you wish to withdraw, any contributions made by the participant will be destroyed.
- Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until April 10, 2014; at which time data from discussions may have already been disseminated. After this date, it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Follow up:

- Participants may access final results of study from the University of Saskatchewan dissertation database.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the UofS Research Ethics Board on December 20, 2013. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office (Toll Free: 1-888-966-2975).

SIGNED CONSENT

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Researcher's Signature	Date

Appendix F: Pre-Discussion Survey

Numbers one through eight will employ a five point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree).

1. Reading *The Foal and the Ranch* has been a transformative experience for me.
2. Reading *The Foal and the Ranch* caused me to think about educational issues I had not previously considered.
3. Reading *The Foal and the Ranch* caused me to think more critically about educational issues.
4. Reading *The Foal and the Ranch* will make talking about educational policies and issues easier.
5. Reading *The Foal and the Ranch* will make talking about educational policies and issues more engaging.
6. I found the format of a fable to be an effective way for me to learn.
7. *The Foal and the Ranch* will help promote productive discussion on educational issues.
8. While I was reading *The Foal and the Ranch*, I thought of someone that needs to read this book.
9. If I could choose any person to read *The Foal and the Ranch* and have a follow up discussion, it would be _____ because

10. The one issue raised in *The Foal and the Ranch* that really stood out to me was _____

because _____

Appendix G: Post-Discussion Survey

Numbers one through seven will employ a five point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree).

1. Discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* has been a transformative experience for me.
2. Discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* allowed me to hear perspectives I had not previously considered.
3. Reading and discussing *The Foal and the Ranch* has caused me to think differently about one or more issues in education.
4. *The Foal and the Ranch* made talking about educational policies and issues easier for me.
5. *The Foal and the Ranch* helped focus discussions about educational policies and issues.
6. After reading *The Foal and the Ranch*, I was more confident discussing educational issues.
7. Overall, *The Foal and the Ranch* helped promote productive discussion on educational issues.
8. The issue presented in *The Foal and the Ranch* that I would like to explore further is

9. What educational policy or issue would you have liked to have seen addressed (but wasn't) in *The Foal and the Ranch*? _____

10. Was there an issue in *The Foal and the Ranch* that you disagree with how it was presented? Please explain why. _____

Appendix H: Discussion Questions Guide

Part A: Use of Fable

1. Describe your feelings and general sense of the utility of using a fable such as this, to raise educational issues and promote discussion.
2. What might make this particular fable more effective?

Part B: Content

1. How do you feel that [situation from the fable] applies to the educational system? (This question can be used multiple times for different situations).
2. After reading this fable, comment on [specific policy].
3. What do you feel is the main message of the fable?
4. What do you feel was the most important issue raised by the fable?
5. What educational issue were you most surprised was not addressed in the fable?
6. What would be an appropriate epilogue (i.e. What is the purpose of education? Describe your ideal educational system)?

Appendix I: Sample of Coding Process

To illustrate the coding process used for analysing discussion groups, I will describe the coding process and provide a sample from discussion group “A.”

Coding of data from each discussion group began with pre-coding words or phrases that stood out upon initial scan of transcript. Examples of pre-coding from group “A” included highlighting the following comments:

“So they [policy makers] can actually have an idea.”

“I think there is a little bit of disconnect.”

“There is a disconnect.”

Pre-coding also included circling key words such as *success* and *potential*.

Next, first-cycle coding used descriptive codes to identify broad topics of discussion including *disconnects* and word *definitions*. Second-cycle coding further divided the broad groups into more specific sub-groups such as specific words (*manageable*, *success*) that were problematic to define. In the case of disconnects, versus coding was used for sub-coding to indicate tension between groups. Examples of versus coding in the following sample are *policy versus practice* and *teachers versus parents*. If more than one descriptive code applied to a specific passage, simultaneous coding was used to categorize the phrase with multiple descriptive codes. The provided sample from group “A” illustrates *ignorance (among policy makers)* and *definitions (potential)* as simultaneous codes to the right of the text.

Descriptive Coding		Group A Transcript Sample	Simultaneous Coding
1 st Cycle	2 nd Cycle		
Disconnect	Policy/practice	A3 - I think the ones making the policies need to be on the ground level and actually see what it is like because I think they...	Ignorance - policy makers
		A1 - Don't understand	
		A3 - Yeah, I think there is a very different view of how things are happening.	
		Researcher - So, instead of take your daughter to work day...	
		A3 - Take your politician (all three laugh and agree)	
Definitions	'manageable'	A3 - And into a real classroom, not the class that "oh, the guest is coming so we'll be extra good." This is what it is like, day-to-day. So they can actually have an idea.	
		A2 - To see the numbers they are giving us and what we have to work with. - And you say classroom sizes are 30, and that is <u>manageable</u> , manageable to who?	
Definitions	'success'	A3 - And at what level of <u>success</u> is that connected to?	
		A2 - Right.	
		Researcher - So, <u>bring policy makers into the situation</u> . What else would you do to help?	
Disconnect	Policy/practice	A1 - When we talk about differentiation, we talk about this, we talk about bullying. You are reading what the legislation is what the outcome, but these real world examples, <u>how</u> does that look? Because when you look at the full <u>potential</u> it sounds really good, but how is that going to look in the classroom? I think there is a little bit of disconnect. So when you have a parent come in, and you know you can help them, you know the resources, you can give them the authentic examples; they are going to trust you.	Definition - 'potential'
Disconnect	Teacher/parent	- As a parent, even if teacher doesn't know, but is willing to go out and find answers, teacher has my full support - I will help you move that mountain. But if you don't, I am going to pull back. <u>There is a disconnect</u> and there is where you lose that team.	

Figure 3. Sample coding from group "A" transcript

When the groups and sub-groups of codes are crystalized, an overall sense of frustration among group “A” participants emerged. A representation of how the codes were used to deconstruct the discussion and crystalize the data into an overall theme for group “A” can be seen in the following illustration:

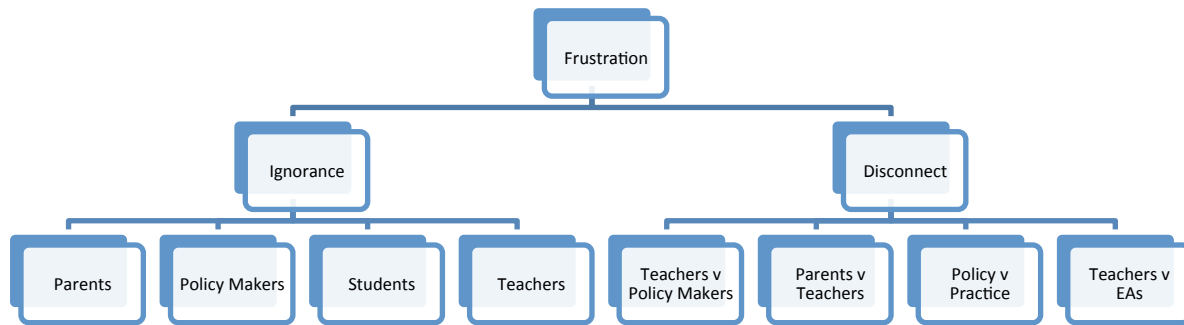


Figure 4. Group “A” Coding Diagram

Appendix J: Initial Contact Sheet

Prospective participants will be contacted by email, phone, or in person and given the following information:

- 1) Who I am and who I represent.

(Joel Hall, Ph.D. candidate, U of S, Educational Administration);

- 2) The nature of the study:

(Qualitative research: The purpose of this study is to use the humanities to initiate transformational discussion and informed dialogue among educational stakeholders.)

- 3) Why they were chosen.

(Potential participants are contacted based on their interest and knowledge of policies and practices of public education in Saskatchewan.)

- 4) What their responsibilities as a participant would be.

(1. Read a fable provided by the researcher (2 to 6 hours); and either:

2. Meet with the researcher in a small group and discuss the content of the fable as well as the effectiveness of using a fable to facilitate discussion about educational issues (2 hours).

Or,

2a. Provide a written response to issues presented in the fable (2 hours).

Contact will have an opportunity to ask any further questions.

If contact is willing to consider participation, I will provide him or her with a letter of consent (in person, by email, or regular mail), and arrange a meeting time.

Appendix K: Data Release Form for Group Discussions



Research Ethics Boards (Behavioural and Biomedical)

DATA RELEASE FORM

Data Release Form for Group Discussions:

I, _____, have reviewed the notes from the group discussions in which I was a participant, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the notes as appropriate. I acknowledge that the notes accurately reflect what I said in the discussion. I hereby authorize the release of these notes to Joel Hall to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher

Appendix L: Data Release Form for Written Responses



Research Ethics Boards (Behavioural and Biomedical)

DATA RELEASE FORM

Data Release Form for Written Responses:

I, _____, hereby authorize the release of this document to Joel Hall to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher

Appendix M: Data Release Form for Focus Groups



Research Ethics Boards (Behavioural and Biomedical)

DATA RELEASE FORM

Data Release Form for Focus Groups:

I, _____, have reviewed the notes from the focus groups in which I was a participant, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the notes as appropriate. I acknowledge that the notes accurately reflect what I said in the discussion. I hereby authorize the release of these notes to Joel Hall to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher

Exhibit A: The Foal and the Ranch

The Foal and the Ranch



Joel Hall

The Foal and the Ranch

Who Should Read This Fable?

If public education impacts you, or someone you care about, this fable was written for you. *The Foal and the Ranch* is simple enough for most eighth-graders to understand, and will also be beneficial for the public servants (i.e., a Minister of Education) – and just about everyone in between. If you are an educational policy maker, administrator, teacher, parent, student, employer, or concerned citizen, I believe this story is worth reading.

What is the Purpose of this Fable?

The objective of *The Foal and the Ranch* is to help initiate informed discussion about the realities of educational issues. Through this fable, readers will witness some of the problems that may occur when: (1) The overall purpose of education is vague, unknown, or unattainable; (2) School policies are not aligned with the overall purpose of education; and (3) Educational policy makers fail to consider financial constraints when they make promises to the public. This fable will enable nearly all readers to better understand existing policies and their implications. Beyond examining current reality, this story will also provide stakeholders with a common context through which they may begin discussing the two foundational questions of public education:

- What is the purpose of education?
- How will public education accomplish this purpose?

Unlike many books about education, this story does not end with a period; it ends with a question mark. I invite you to read the fable, consider the questions, and enter the conversation.

When you eventually see through the veils to how things really are, you will keep saying again and again, ‘this is certainly not like we thought it was!’ (Rumi)

Chapter 1: The Jubilant Learner

“Daddy! Dad! Dad!” my snow-white filly whinnies as she gallops into the barn. I awaken from my afternoon nap.

“I’m back here!” I nicker to her. While I am excited to see my only foal, I have to steady myself for what is to come. Her excitement, her happiness, that sparkle in her eyes...what kind of father am I that her happiness should bring me so much pain? Loose straw flies up from her hooves as she flings herself around the corner and bursts into my stall. I brace myself for impact and force myself to smile.

“Whoa! Whoa!” But I am too late. She crashes into me, driving me back into the stable wall. In her elation, she doesn’t even notice that she nearly knocked me over. I suppose it is my own fault, though, she has done this to me nearly every day for a month. I should know by now that when she charges in, I should stand against some hay bales, or lie down...or hide!

“Dad! Today was so great! I am learning so much and I am loving it!” She is speaking so fast I can hardly understand her. “I want to tell you all about it!”

“I want to hear all about it!” I’m not *completely* lying. For her sake, I try to match her enthusiasm, but I doubt I am successful. Thankfully, her excitement is enough for both of us – she doesn’t seem to sense my reluctance.

“I can’t tell you about it now,” she shrieks, “but I will tell you everything tonight at feeding time!”

“Why not just stay?” I ask her. “We can go over to the water trough and get a drink and then just find a shady spot in the pasture where we can talk.”

“Sorry Dad,” she says as she rears back on her hind legs. “I’ve got more to learn before suppertime.”

I try to mask my concern. I am so happy to see her excited and flourishing but, in my experience, this enthusiasm for learning quickly gets drained out of a foal. Mind you, things seem to have really changed...but I have thought that before. After all my family and I have been through, I cannot be blamed for being cynical. I know so little about this new training program – if you can even call it that. Is it training? Is it a program? *Learning system* maybe? Perhaps I’ll understand it better after my filly tells me about it tonight. If, that is, she can contain herself long enough to explain it!

“Okay, bye Dad!” she whinnies as she starts to trot off.

“Have fun!” I reply, as I follow her out the stable door. “But you are forgetting one thing.” I lower my face towards her.

She ambles back. I turn my cheek towards her, but instead of my cheek, she lifts her head higher and kisses me on my muzzle. “I love you, Dad,” she whispers quietly, then adds as she turns to leave, “you look tired, maybe you should rest.”

My young filly starts to trot off, her excitement returning with each step, “You know,” she calls out over her shoulder, “when I hear stories about the Training Ranches they used to have, they seem so old-fashioned. Education has come a long way, since the ‘good ol’ days,’ don’t you think?”

Obviously this is a rhetorical question because she gallops out of the stable and across the yard without so much as a glance back.

As I think about her words, she is right about one thing – the old Training Ranches had become outdated. They were designed in a different time by different owners with different needs. But she was wrong about the other, I have *never* referred to my days at Ranch as ‘the good ol’ days’!

Sometimes, my time at Ranch feels like it was only a dream. It is funny how events can seem so long ago, so distant, that it is as if they happened to someone else. But, at the same time, they feel so close – and the pain is fresh like an open wound. Actually, it is not funny at all.

Out of habit, I mindlessly walk back into my stall. Suddenly exhausted, I fall down on my straw bed with such force that I even surprise myself. My large torso lands on my left foreleg in an uncomfortable way, but I am too weary to even adjust my position. As I lay my head down on the straw, I think of the stories of my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my dad, and just how I got to be this way...

Chapter 2: The Creation of Outcomes

Not a lot is known about my great-grandfather, but what we do know is that, like the owners of the time, he was from a hardy breed. His name was simply, Dan. I never met Dan, but when I was a colt I remember my grandad talking about him. I can still recall the day I asked Grandad about his father...

It was the first spring after my father had died and my owner's daughter rode me to visit Grandad's owners. In the past, they had not used me for these rides because I was still quite young, but now their daughter insisted on riding me because, although I was very big for my age, I was gentle, and I knew how to avoid loose stones and give her a smooth ride. When we arrived, the daughter took off my saddle and bridle, and when she finished brushing me, my mane shone full and white – it was our family trait. She released me in the large corral and I searched for Grandad. I finally found him, quietly laying in the shade in the furthest corner. I think he was sleeping when I nudged him, but he said he was just resting his eyes.

Now, most horses live to be twenty-five or maybe thirty years old, but last month we celebrated Grandad's thirty-third birthday. When he smiled, his lips rolled back showing a mouth void of all but about five teeth. The teeth that did remain were sickly yellow from age and neglect, and when his face came close I could smell old wet hay and rot. I remember wondering to myself if this was where the phrase *don't look an old horse in the mouth* came from (I discovered later that the saying was *gift* horse, not *old* horse, but I learned not to look *either* of them in the mouth!).

It took Grandad a few minutes to gather himself and stand up. Without speaking, we slowly walked to the water trough and he drank. When he finished he moved out of the way and motioned with his head for me to drink; I did. The water was warm but clean, and still refreshing – it seemed to perk Grandad up and as we slowly walked around the corral, we began to talk.

It was still too soon for either of us to talk about Dad, so we discussed just about everything else: the weather, our hay supply (he favoured quality but I couldn't tell the difference, so I just wanted quantity!), our owners, and who we liked in the Kentucky Derby race that was to be run in less than two weeks.

“Slippery Slag will lap Sabretooth!” I confidently declared, “Slag is bigger and stronger and besides, Sabretooth starts too fast, after a mile he will tire out and in the last quarter mile Slippery Slag will fly past him for the win!”

“Maybe,” the old horse said slowly, “I’ve seen it happen just like you said.”

But then he looked at me out of the corner of his eye and added, “But, maybe not.”

We walked on in silence and I said, “I start my training at Ranch this fall.”

He showed no sign that he had heard me, so I repeated louder, “I start my training at Ranch this fall, Grandad.”

“Mmhhh,” he mumbled. He suddenly looked very tired.

“Should we go lie in the shade?” I asked.

Without a word he turned and we slowly walked back near the place where I first found him when I had arrived. The sun had moved, so we went a little further to where an old shed and a blooming poplar tree gave us some reprieve from the mid-afternoon heat.

I brought over some straw I had found and spread it out for Grandad to lie down on. I helped him prop his aged head on a mound of dirt so he could see me more easily while we visited, and then I made myself comfortable beside him. There we lay in silence. I thought he was asleep when suddenly he said, “You know, it was your Great-Grandad’s owners who started that Ranch.”

“It was?” I cannot say I was surprised, but you know how it is, when something exists from before you were born, you just tend to think of it as having always existed. Or maybe, more accurately, you don’t think about it at all.

“Oh yeah, in fact, his younger brother, was one of the first to go to training. Before that, horses were just trained by their owner or, if they were rented out, by their renter. It was all pretty informal.”

“What was Great-Grandad’s name again?” I know I had heard it but I couldn’t remember.

“It was Dan. His name was Dan.”

Just saying his Dad’s name seemed to bring back memories for Grandad and he perked up a little. I wanted to know more.

“Dan. That was that short for Daniel? Or was it Danny?” I asked.

“Nah,” the old horse spit as he talked, “Pappy always used to say his owners were ‘too busy for fancy names like that!’ It was just Dan. And when I asked him what his middle name

was, he would laugh and say, ‘my owners were too poor; they couldn’t afford to give us middle names!’”

We laughed. I had heard the middle name joke before, but seeing Grandad re-live it in his memory moved me. He wiped a tear from his eye with his fetlock and sighed contentedly, lost in his thoughts. After a few minutes of nothing but the sounds of the wind blowing through the leaves of the poplar tree above our heads, I wondered out loud...

“So how did Ranch start? Was it in the old building it is in now?”

Grandad seemed startled, like he had forgotten I was there.

“Yes, oh yes, that is the building,” he replied. “How did it start? I’ll tell you how it started: it started with the best of intentions.”

When I think back, I should have picked up on the peculiarity of his reply and the bitterness in his voice, but I was just a colt.

He continued, “You see, back then Pappy’s owners had just arrived in these parts from far out East. There was Pappy and Ma, and two of Pappy’s brothers. Their owners were strong, brave souls – and likely a bit naïve – they had left everything in search of a better life for their son and daughter. All they brought with them was what they could fit on the wagon that my uncles pulled and the packs on Ma and Pappy.”

I could imagine Grandad as a young colt hearing this story of his heritage; pride welled up as he continued.

“Pappy was a big, strong, stallion – much bigger than I ever was – and just like you, his coat was white and he had a long white mane. But Ma,” he stopped briefly, “as perfectly white as Pappy seemed, beside Ma, Pappy looked grey. She was strong and beautiful and worked long after the stallions needed to stop and rest.”

“Their owners settled near here, and Pappy and my uncles became plow horses for the farm. Ma was generally used for less physical tasks like riding or pulling a cocking cart because her owners did not want her getting hurt – she was the only mare, and they needed more horses for the farm.”

“What about Ranch?” I interjected impatiently. I was barely a year old, and my youth betrayed me. Had I known that Grandad would die that summer, and everything he knew – everything he was about to tell me about my family – would die with him, I may have listened

more and spoken less. It is true, sometimes education is wasted on the young, but I try not to live with regret.

“The Ranch?” Grandad, seemed to have forgotten the point of his story, maybe it *was* better I had interrupted.

“Oh yes, the Ranch. After a few years, the community had become established as an area for agriculture – mainly wheat and hay - and raising horses. It was a natural combination, I suppose. But a problem soon arose. Owners buying horses didn’t just want big, strong horses – although they surely did want that as well, they wanted horses that were trained to plow and would obey basic commands. The farmers who owned the horses, like Pappy’s owners, were too busy with their crops and older plow horses to train the foals, so they didn’t know what to do.”

“Yep,” Grandad continued after licking his dry, cracked lips, “After taking their owner to the big meeting, Ma waited outside and she heard the whole thing. There was a heated debate and, trust me, emotions ran high! You see, some owners said they were losing money because customers were going to the next town to buy horses that had been trained to plow at a special Ranch. ‘It is our livelihood!’ they cried, ‘if we can’t compete we will lose everything!’”

“I don’t see what the big deal is.” I was confused. “To sell horses, the owners needed to have trained foals, right? And if the farmers didn’t have time to do it themselves, why not just get together and hire someone else to do it? No offense Grandad, but owners back then were pretty, um, simple.”

“Simple?” Grandad echoed. Interestingly, he said it in reflection, not in offense. “Simple? I suppose it depends on what you mean by simple. These owners were used to a simple life – a life not too different from us horses: they worked, they ate, and they slept – and sometimes they did not eat or sleep much. But if simple means stupid, you could not be more wrong. You send some of today’s Advanced Training horses and their owners with letters after their names to a dry barren wasteland with nothing but a pot, a plow, and the shirt on their backs, and you will see stupid! I guess I would say, in hindsight, the owners were not simple, but they were ignorant about some things.”

“So why did some owners resist the change?” I asked.

“There were those who believed that a foal should be trained by his owners,” he answered. “Each family is unique, each foal is unique, each farm is unique, and not all plows are exactly the same either. These owners wanted to maintain the responsibility of training their

own foals and they believed that, in the end, their horses would be as sought after – or more sought after – than those trained at a community Ranch.”

“Well then the answer is obvious,” I blurted. “Owners who want to hire someone to train their foals can do so, and those who don’t, don’t. Everyone is happy.”

Grandad looked at me, “Have I told you this story before?”

“No, why? I’m right aren’t I?”

“You are right about what they did...”

“I knew it!” I shouted.

“But wrong about everyone being happy.”

“Why?” I asked, “They all got what they wanted. Why wouldn’t they be happy?”

Grandad replied to this question in a way that I knew he was saying something he wanted me to remember – and I always have. He stopped, intentionally looked me in the eyes and said, “Are you listening to me?”

“Yes,” I said. I was almost scared.

“Outcomes,” he said slowly, “do not come from intentions, they come from actions.”

The old horse stared at me as I considered his words. Finally, I responded, “I’m not sure I follow you, Grandad.”

He smiled at me, and suddenly I realized I did not care about his missing teeth and rotting gums anymore.

He repeated himself slowly but in a way that I did not feel foalish, I felt like he was talking to me like a stallion. I respected him for this. “Outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions.”

I must have still looked confused, because he began to explain it to me.

“Well, first,” he said, “you have to understand the terms...you know, what the words mean...I remember when I was a foal, in my first week of Ranch I was beaten every day, just because I did not know what a word meant.”

“What word,” I asked.

“It seems silly now, he smiled sheepishly, “but I didn’t know what a *stall* was. The trainer kept telling me to get into the stall – I thought a stall was the stable...and I was already in the stable! I thought I was obeying! Whew! Every day the beatings got worse, the trainer, of course, just thought I was being stubborn.”

“That is horrible,” I said as I shook my head in disgust.

“Shows the importance on clarifying definitions,” he said. “So, in this case, intentions are what they *want* – sometimes they call them purposes or goals or *desired* outcomes; actions are what owners *do*; and outcomes are what actually happen...what they *get*.”

I tried to clarify: “So, you are saying that results are determined by actions, not intentions. Is that right?”

“Yes,” he nodded, but he could obviously see I still wasn’t exactly sure what he was talking about. “Do you want an example?” he asked.

“I probably need one,” I answered.

“Remember that disease that a lot of mares were getting in the winter?” Grandad asked.

“Sure,” I said, “lots of the pregnant mares got so sick they couldn’t even leave their stalls – it was all my owners talked about for months!”

“What did your owners do about it?” he asked.

“The vet said that he had a medicine that would make them feel better, so the owners paid him to give an injection to the pregnant mares that were sick.”

“And what happened?”

“They started feeling better and they could leave their stalls again – my owners were very happy! I was happy too, because one of the mares they helped was my aunt.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Grandad said. “And how is your aunt doing now?”

“Well, not very well. I think her body is healthy, but she is really sad because when her foal was born a few weeks ago it came out lame. Her owners had to put the foal down. My aunt doesn’t even leave her stall.” I shivered as I remembered watching her owners take away my little cousin as my aunt screamed in a way I never thought a horse could.

“It was sad indeed,” Grandad said softly. “Has anyone told you why the foal was born lame?”

It seemed like a silly question, “Sometimes foals are born lame,” I answered flatly.

“That is true,” Grandad said, “but your cousin was not the only foal born lame this spring. Every mare that was given the medicine gave birth to a lame foal – and they were all put down. That is why there are so few sucklings around this year.”

I hadn’t thought about that. Aside from when I was first born, this was my first spring so I did not know there were fewer foals than usual. My thoughts went back to my aunt and her

owners, they were so happy when the medicine made her feel well again. Even my Mom talked about “the miracles of modern medicine” and exclaimed, “What will they think of next?”

“So if my aunt and the others hadn’t been given the medicine, everything would have been okay?” I asked.

“Probably not for her,” Grandad said. “There were a few mares who were sick but weren’t given the medicine and, from what I understand, they survived just long enough to give birth to healthy foals, but it took the owners lots of extra time and effort to get them through the winter and the birth alive.”

“What can you learn from this?” Grandad asked me.

“Don’t trust vets!” I declared.

“Maybe,” Grandad chuckled. “What else, what did I tell you?”

“Outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions.” The words started to have meaning.

I was considering what Grandad said. I thought about my aunt, her owners, and my Mom; and suddenly it hit me – this was not a sad story!

“Grandad!” I startled him with my sudden exclamation. “You said that actions, not intentions, will produce a certain outcome, right?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“Then,” I continued, “you can’t know if the outcome from an action was good or bad unless you know what the *desired* outcome was, right?”

“What do you mean?” Grandad inquired as he leaned forward.

“Well, I thought the medicine was bad because all the foals were born lame and had to be put down. But the medicine made my aunt feel better, and once she gets over losing her foal, she can have more foals. So the outcome was good so the action was good, right?”

“Maybe,” he replied. “What was the *desired* outcome that your aunt’s owners had in mind when they paid the vet to give her the shot?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. “I assume it was to make her feel good.”

“Okay, let’s assume that, for now,” Grandad agreed. “Then, their actions created their desired outcomes over the winter because your aunt felt better immediately, right?”

“Right,” I agreed.

“But due to the loss of her foal, she is not feeling good now, is she?”

“No, she is really struggling,” I answered.

“So, in the short-term, the owners were successful; in the medium-term, they weren’t; and the long-term...”

“...we don’t know,” I finished his thought.

“That’s right,” Grandad agreed. “Only time will tell if the actions of your aunt’s owners’ met the desired outcome of having her feel good, or not. And even then, we will probably never know.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“How do you know someone is *good*? In your aunt’s case, her body may have recovered and seems to be healthy, but is it as good as it could be? How do you measure *good*? You would need to compare it to something. What would you compare it to?”

I wasn’t sure if it was a rhetorical question, but I answered, “I guess you would put it on a scale, maybe from one to ten.”

“Probably,” Grandad replied, “and what is a ten?”

“As good as it gets!” I smiled.

“So, if your aunt was a three out of ten, is she good? Five out of ten? Seven?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted.

“And who would give her the score anyway? Someone else would have no way of knowing how your aunt feels inside; and if she assessed herself, how would we compare that to other horses that may be more optimistic, or pessimistic? Plus, we are only talking about her physical good, don’t emotions and other mental issues make up a horse’s *good* as well?”

“How could we measure all that?” I wondered out loud.

“Until we could measure it, what would be the point of having an outcome of *good*?” Grandad asked.

“It would make owners feel good about themselves; because they show that they have good (whatever that means!) intentions. But other than that, I don’t really see a...ohhhh,” it suddenly hit me, “It doesn’t matter what intentions an owner has, if the outcome from the actions cannot be measured – it is useless.”

“Useless?” Grandad pondered this. “It is a good intention. It sounds great and looks good on paper or on a sign. It may provide a little direction. But overall, I would agree with

you, if owners care about purpose and accountability and leadership like they are always saying they do, an outcome that cannot be measured is essentially useless.”

“Worse than not having a use,” he added, “as your father and his owner proved, a promised outcome that goes unfulfilled can ruin lives and bring down a whole organization. But that is a story for another day.”

Before I could ask, Grandad continued. His mind was obviously clearing as he spoke, because he picked up exactly where he had left off... “So, now let’s consider a different desired outcome. What if, above all else, your aunt’s owners wanted her to give birth to a healthy foal?”

I thought about it for a minute, and then replied, “If they thought the medicine would help her deliver a healthy foal, they would have still given it to her. But they would have been wrong.”

Grandad asked, “What does that tell you?”

“Outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions.”

We sat staring at each other for several minutes before Grandad broke the silence,

“So, now let’s put all this to use. Let’s go ahead in time. Imagine that over the summer, your aunt started feeling well again and she is bred. Around Christmas, she starts getting sick.”

“The same thing that happened this past year,” I noted.

“Exactly,” Grandad nodded. “Now, if you were her owner, what would you do?”

“Well, I could pay for the medicine,” I thought out loud, “and she would feel better, then bad for a while, but then good again. Her foal would die, though. But she would stay alive and may be able to have another foal...but maybe she would just keep getting sick every winter.”

“What’s another option?” Grandad prodded.

“I could choose not to give her the medicine. It would be a lot of work but, in the end, I would have a new foal that I could sell, keep for the farm, or maybe breed. My aunt would die though.”

We lay in silence as I thought. Finally I said, “This is tough. If I want my aunt to live, I choose the medicine, if I want the foal to live, I don’t.”

Grandad was teaching me and I knew it. He said, “What are you really deciding?”

“My desired outcome.” I answered immediately. “But, I don’t know what I would want – this is tough!”

“For today, I’ll make it easy on you. I am going to give you your desired outcome: a healthy foal. So what action do you choose?” Grandad asked.

“Okay, now that’s easier,” I replied. “I would not give my aunt the medicine, and I would put in the time and effort needed to get her through the birth. The choice becomes pretty obvious once I know – or am told – my desired outcome.”

“It does, doesn’t it,” Grandad smiled. “Now this may sound ridiculous, but I want to ask you a question: Let’s say your neighbor, who also has a sick mare, chooses to save the mare by giving her medicine, would you give your aunt the medicine, too?”

It did seem like a ridiculous question, so I answered his question with a question, “If my desire is to save the foal, why would I give her the medicine that would kill the foal - regardless of what anyone else does?”

“Indeed,” Grandad nodded, “but what if your intentions in giving her the medicine was to make her feel better AND to save the foal?”

I knew where he was going, I recited my line: “Outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions. It doesn’t matter what my intentions are – no matter how honourable – certain actions *will* create certain outcomes.”

Grandad continued, “And what if you want to save your aunt but didn’t give her the medicine...maybe you could not afford it?”

“Then it would be senseless of me to expect her to survive...regardless of my desire to save my aunt, my *actions* will determine the outcome,” I said.

“What else have you learned?” Grandad asked. I thought for a moment.

“Actions are neither good nor bad,” I replied slowly, “apart from knowing what outcome you want. You have to know your desired outcome before you can choose your action.”

“And,” I continued, “that means that an action that is right for one owner may be wrong for another – it all depends what they want.”

“Nicely done,” Grandad congratulated me. “Now I can tell you the story of how the training Ranch was started.

The Ranch! I had completely forgotten about his story about how dad’s owners had helped start the Ranch. What did the Ranch have to do with my aunt and her foal? Just as Grandad was about to tell me, my owner’s daughter came around the corner.

“There you are!” She exclaimed, “C’mon, it’s time to go home.”

I gave a short squeal of protest but she quickly added, “Don’t worry, we’ll be back to visit next week – you are coming with me from now on!”

As she led me away, I was able to pull my head back for one last glance at Grandad. He looked peaceful and I think he was already dozing off.

Chapter 3: Apple Pie and Consequences of Actions

Over the next week, I thought about everything Grandad had told me. It seemed like everywhere I looked, the old horse's words rang true. The first thing I noticed was how few sucklings were around – I guess most of the owners chose to give their mares the medicine. I was sad as I thought about my aunt; she was still hardly eating, and she didn't come out of her stall the entire week. Aside from being a little weak from lack of nourishment, she was physically healthy again...but I still would not have called her *good*.

I also thought about what Grandad told me, that "Outcomes do not come from intentions, they come from actions." I thought about the truth of his words as I watched my owner's wife. She was a kind woman, she treated her horses and her kids well. She had walnut coloured hair and eyes, and a soft voice. Although not very tall, she was quite heavy, making it difficult to find a horse suitable for her. She often hosted parties for her neighbors, and she loved fashion – it seemed she wore a new hat every time she went to town.

When my owner's wife went to town, she had a definite routine. She and her daughter would hitch me to the small cart and we would leave just after lunch. We would make four stops: first, the hardware store for supplies for the owner; next, the grocery store; after that, we would stop at the clothing store (oh! How owners do obsess about their clothes!). This is where the owner's wife got most of her hats. And finally, we would stop at the bakery before returning home.

The owner's wife and her daughter would go into the bakery and I would wait nearby for their return. When the two females would finally come out, the smell of fresh baked bread would waft into my nostrils and I would just close my eyes and inhale deeply. Each week the scene repeated itself: the daughter carried a bag with bread and buns, and the woman carried a box tied with thin twine which she kept beside her on the cart. The daughter once asked her mother what was in the box, and the woman answered, "Just something for me." It was never discussed again. But, if the wind was right, I could sometimes smell sugar and cinnamon as I pulled the cart home.

Lately though, something had changed. Instead of the females going into the clothing store, we would just stop out front. The owner's wife would get down from the cart and walk toward the small shop. Her daughter would look on in silence as her mother would gaze at the deep green silk dress in the window and say, "Isn't it beautiful?" And then she would reach

toward the dress, touch her hand to the glass, and add, “I want that dress more than anything. More than anything!” Sometimes there was a tear in eye as she walked away and went to the bakery. Previously, I had wondered why she didn’t just get the dress – she seemed to buy everything else! This week I got my answer.

The last time we passed through town – two days ago – my owner’s daughter was once again with my owner’s wife when she went through the same routine at the shop window. My owner’s wife stared at the dress as she had done countless times before and whispered, “...more than anything.”

Obviously wondering the same thing as I had so many times before, the daughter asked, “If you want it more than anything, why don’t you just buy it?”

“Oh darling,” my owner’s wife said as she climbed back onto the cart, “the dress only comes in certain sizes, and the largest size they carry is two sizes smaller than what I would need.” Tears welled in her eyes for a moment and then she composed herself, snapped my reins, and quietly, but firmly, commanded me, “Yaw! To the bakery.”

That day, my owner’s daughter emerged from the bakery with the usual bag of bread and buns, but my owner’s wife carried a box that was significantly larger than usual. Along with sugar and cinnamon, I could also smell apple and chocolate. As I took them home, I briefly thought about her desires, her actions, and her outcomes. Most of all, however, I just pondered whether devouring the contents of the box would be worth the beating my owner would give me...I decided I did not want the beating and trotted home.

Chapter 4: How the Ranch Began

It had been a week since I saw Grandad and I was excited to hear more about how the Ranch started. We arrived at his owner's farm just before noon. I found him in the same spot I had the week before. When I saw him, he was facing the other direction and he did not know I was there. He was standing at the fence, as far as I could tell, he was gazing at the horizon, not really looking at anything – apparently lost in thought. His whitish-grey coat did not shine as it once had, and his body was sunken around his flanks and shoulders, but still pretty good for his age. His tail was still lively as it constantly swatted bugs away from his hind quarters and legs.

As we had done the previous week, we went to the trough for a drink of water and then settled down in the shade to talk. He listened intently as I told him how I had noticed that there were very few foals around the community. He nodded and seemed pleased with me when I told him about my observations of my owner's wife. But I knew we didn't have much time, so I asked him about Ranch, "You said that your dad's owners started the first Ranch, right?"

Grandad got right into the story. "Yessir, them and some other families around here. Remember what I told you? Customers wanted trained plow horses for their farms so some of the owners decided to get together and hire a trainer."

"And some chose not to," I added.

"Right," Grandad nodded. "So, Pappy's owners volunteered some extra land they had, and their neighbor said their son could train the horses – he had been around horses all his life. All the owners who put a horse in this training chipped in some money to pay the trainer a little bit. It was very basic training – mostly pulling an old plow in a pasture."

"So when did the Ranch in town get built?" I asked.

"Well, there were a lot of changes in the first couple of years. About three months after starting this community training, the neighbor's son got a better job and left. The wife of another owner took over, but she left a couple weeks later after a foal fell on her and broke her leg. Three more trainers came and went in the first year. Meanwhile, someone offered Pappy's owners some money as rent if they could use the training pasture as farmland, so the training had to be done somewhere else. Between all the changes and turnover, the foals in training progressed very little and the owners were not pleased. But then things really changed."

Grandad took a deep breath and continued, "At the time, many communities experienced the same thing: they wanted trained plow horses, but community groups were not able to create a

program with a competent trainer and reasonable stable facilities. Many of the owners complained to the mayors of their closest town. Mayors from all over the region met to discuss the problem and decide what to do.”

“The mayors actually met in Pappy’s owner’s barn,” Grandad went on. “At first, there were four of them, but after a year, the mayors from all ten towns joined the newly formed training group. At the first meeting, however, the four mayors stated the problem: Owners need well-trained plow horses to either work on their farm or else to sell. They decided they would form the Provincial Training Group (the PTG) and their goal would be *to train foals to be plow horses*.”

“So that was their intention – their desired outcome?” I asked. I was trying to put it all together.

“Yes,” Grandad said, “that is what they said they would do for every foal enrolled at the Ranch.”

“So they formalized the training? That does seem like a big change.” I observed.

“Not to mention, expensive,” Grandad added. “So the mayors made two rules. The first concerned the cost: all owners in the region must pay taxes to the PTG for the operation of local Ranches.”

“Even owners who chose not to send their foals to the PTG Ranch?”

“Yep.”

“What about owners who didn’t have foals at all?” I asked.

“Everyone,” Grandad replied evenly. “They made one more rule, for consistency – and to make sure the system was fair - all Ranches were to have three stations for the foals: the Work stall, the Feeding Trough, and the Pasture for rest. Foals would rotate through the three stations.”

“So, what happened?” I asked eagerly.

“Immediately, each town began building a training stable from the taxes collected in their district. Meanwhile, owners who wanted to work as trainers at the Ranch went to a special three month trainer-training program. The four Ranches were to open that fall. How do you think it went?” Grandad asked me.

“Hmmm.” I thought about it, “Each town gets a stable built by their own taxes – that seems fair. Each trainer is trained at the same place – that seems reasonable. And, each foal,

regardless of which Ranch they attend will get the same three things: work, food, and rest. It sounds like the mayors thought of everything, Grandad.”

“It does, doesn’t it?” Grandad agreed. “And that fall the four Ranches opened as planned. As you would expect, some foals did really well – they were naturally big and strong and quickly learned how to pull a plow. Others got stronger as the year progressed. Still others were weak or sickly, so the trainer just sent them home and told the owners that they were wasting their time trying to get these foals to pull a plow.”

“So was it a success?” I asked. It was hard for me to tell.

“That was the same question the other six mayors wanted to know,” Grandad replied, “so they went to the four towns to inspect the Ranches.”

“What did they find?” I wondered aloud.

“First, they found that the average one-year old foal started training weighing five hundred pounds and finished the year weighing six hundred pounds. This was a little more than yearlings that did not go to the Ranch.”

“Success!” I concluded.

“That’s what they thought too,” Grandad replied, “until they investigated further. What they found was that at Ranch 1, all six foals gained over one hundred and thirty five pounds. Ranch 2 and Ranch 3 had foals that gained about ninety pounds. And Ranch 4 only had two foals finish the year; they gained sixty-five and seventy pounds respectively.”

“That doesn’t sound quite so successful,” I observed.

“No,” Grandad replied, “and it gets worse. Ranch 1 started with six foals and all six completed the year of training; Ranch 2 also had six foals start and trainers told the owners of one of them not to bring him back; Ranch 3 started with eight foals and two were too weak or sick to be allowed to continue; and Ranch 4 started with ten foals and eight were not permitted to continue.”

“Why were the Ranches so different?” I asked.

“The six mayors wondered the same thing. ‘Surely Ranch 1 has an exceptional trainer and the Ranch 4 trainer needs to find a new job,’ they speculated. So they brought in the four trainers for an interview and demonstration. Upon evaluation they found that the four trainers were nearly equal. The mayors decided to go look at each Ranch...maybe there they would find a clue as to what lead to the wide discrepancy.”

“Several weeks later,” Grandad continued, “the six mayors left on their tour. Upon arriving in the first town, they easily found Ranch 1. The stable was the tallest building in town, and the grounds were immaculate. Inside, there were seven stalls, each with a plow machine – one for each foal. The mayors concluded that there was no reason why any foal should fail in this environment and wondered what the problem was at the other three Ranches – especially Ranch 4.”

“The following day, the six mayors visited Ranch 2 and Ranch 3 as the towns were in neighboring districts and considered themselves *sister towns*. The two Ranches were built accordingly. Using the same plans, the two towns had built modest stables and had three plow machines each for the foals to share. The mayors were quite disappointed in the training facilities compared to what they had seen the previous day. They wondered what they would find at Ranch 4 the following day.”

“Ranch 4 was a disaster. The ‘stable’ was nothing more than a lean-to that had originally been used keep hay dry – in fact, half of it was still used for that purpose. After an extensive search, the mayors found one rusted plow machine that looked unusable. The trainer said the machine had been bought used at the start of the training year, but due to all the foals sharing, and the lack of good storage space, it had deteriorated quickly. The trainer showed a machine that he had built at home and brought for the foals to use – it was basic, but worked pretty well.”

“Why didn’t they all build nice buildings and have nice equipment like Ranch 1?” I asked.

“Remember how they raised the money for the Ranches?” Grandad asked. “The PTG taxed the owners and the money went to their local Ranch.” He answered his own question and then continued, “When the mayors checked the tax records they found that because of the difference in wealth between the districts, Ranch 1 brought in nearly five times more tax money than Ranch 4. As you would expect, Ranch 2 and Ranch 3 were somewhere in the middle.”

“That’s not fair!” I stated the obvious.

“Wait,” Grandad said, “there’s more. When the tax records from Ranch 2 and 3 were examined closer, the three foals that were not permitted to continue training came from the three poorest owners. Likely because of poor quality food at home, the foals from poor homes were not as big as the other foals so their trainer told them to stop coming. Later on, it was also

discovered that foals owned by poor owners could do just as well at Ranch if they took a shorter summer break, but trainers did not want to work all summer, so no changes were made.”

“That all sounds pretty unfair,” I said again. “But you said the six mayors joined the PTG anyway. How did that happen?”

“That story is going to have to wait until next week,” Grandad said as he looked over my shoulder.

My owner’s daughter was coming to get me. Grandad’s stories made time go by so quickly, and I felt like I was learning so much – I hated to leave.

Chapter 5: The Underlying Purpose

The following week my owner's daughter came and saddled me up – I was so excited to go visit Grandad and hear more about the Ranch that I even let her put the bit in my mouth on the first try. On the walk to Grandad's we passed by the Ranch I would be starting in a few months. The main feature of the Ranch was the red stable located about twenty steps from the street. The stable was a large rectangular shaped brick building with small windows at regular intervals down each wall. Though very simple in design, for a colt it was hard not to be in awe of the magnitude of the structure as it was, by far, the largest building in town.

There was a crew of owners standing at the near corner of the stable. I heard my owner's wife tell her daughter that they were planning to paint the whole building as soon as Ranch let out for the summer – something they did every summer to keep the building looking new. To the right of the stable there was a pasture, and a feeding trough that could be moved indoors when it rained. Behind the stable, there was also a small field used for plow training. I had only seen the Ranches in two other towns, but they looked just like this one, and I have been told that if you have seen one Ranch, you have seen them all. I wondered if the other yearlings in other towns were as scared and excited as I was to start Ranch in the fall. As I wondered, something caught my eye.

Over the Ranch entrance was a wooden sign declaring to all who entered the grounds, the purpose of the Ranch. I had seen the sign, and read the purpose, on countless trips passed the Ranch, but this time I noticed that there was something odd about the sign. It looked as though something else used to be written on the sign, and the purpose statement was just written over top. Although someone had obviously tried to rub out the old words, they could still be seen written underneath. I squinted and read the faded words, *To train foals to be plow horses*. Just like Grandad said, that must have been the original sign with the purpose the four mayors had come up with! I felt a light kick in my ribs, but I did not need her encouragement, I sped up my pace so I could hear what happened next.

After what had become our customary routine of a getting a drink of water before laying in the shade, I told Grandad what I had discovered: "When I passed by the Ranch on the walk here, I noticed that you can still see the old purpose written underneath the new purpose. Someone had tried to erase it, but you could still see that it had said *To train foals to be plow horses*."

Grandad smiled and said, “Really? I had never noticed that. But I guess it doesn’t surprise me – when you try to fix something by just covering over top, the old often just comes back. As difficult and painful as it is, sometimes the old has to be completely destroyed before the new can thrive.”

Grandad was lost in thought. I was confused – we were just talking about a sign, how is replacing a sign painful?

“I don’t think I understand what you mean, Grandad,” I said.

He nodded slowly, and, as he seemed to like to do, he explained with another example from my own life. “You know how the inside of your barn has all those water stains on the walls from when the roof used to leak?”

“Sure,” I replied. “My stall is the worst! My owners have painted over those stains at least five times. The walls look good for a little while, but then the stains come through the paint as obvious as ever. My owners have tried everything to cover them, but nothing works.”

“That’s right,” Grandad nodded. “It seems that the only way to get rid of the stains and make the barn nice, once and for all, is to demolish the whole barn and rebuild it – this time with a proper roof.”

“That seems like an awful lot of trouble just to get rid of water stains!” I countered.

“It is,” he agreed. “That is why your owners haven’t done it yet. Their family has owned that farm for generations. Your owner’s grand-father built that barn with his own two hands. It will be a sad and painful day when that barn comes down – not to mention the great expense of building a new one.”

“So they will leave it up and just ignore the stains, I guess. It is easier and cheaper for them that way. It doesn’t really matter anyway, after a while you don’t even notice the stains, only when other people come over – they notice right away,” I said.

“Well as painful and expensive as it will be for them, the day will come when that barn will have to come down. The stains you see coming through the paint are part of a bigger problem. The water that leaked in has rotted the wood and weakened the walls. One of these days, the barn will just collapse.”

“On my head!” I cried.

“No, no,” Grandad reassured me, I could tell he felt bad, “sorry for scaring you!” He went on, “It will not collapse all at once, your owners will see signs that the barn is weakening

before it collapses: it will lean, or sag, or get holes and it will stop serving the purpose it was built for – to keep us horses safe and our hay dry. Hopefully when they see these signs, they will pay the price and take the initiative to control the demolition. It is hard for owners to pay for something that they have always taken for granted, but if they don't...well, if they don't they will lose more than just a building."

I could tell Grandad felt bad for scaring me, because he changed the subject quickly.

"So, the six new mayors joined the Provincial Training Group, taking it up to ten members."

I, too, was happy to move on but I must admit, for the next few nights every time the wind made the old barn creak, I woke up squealing thinking the roof was going to fall on my head.

"So, what happened when the other mayors joined?" I encouraged him to continue.

"Well," Grandad recalled, "now that every district in the region was involved in the PTG, the ten mayors had more power to make rules that they thought would help everyone. Based on what they had seen from their tour of the four Ranches, they decided that the PTG would collect taxes from all owners in the region (regardless of if they had foals who attended training) but they would change how the money was distributed. Rather than money staying in the owner's community, each town would get the same amount. In addition, the PTG would be responsible to build identical Ranches in each town so that none of the owners had an advantage."

"Ohhhh," it made sense to me now. "That is why they say that if you have seen one Ranch, you have seen them all – that was done on purpose."

"That's right," Grandad nodded, "and it wasn't just the buildings and grounds that were to be the same, they wanted all foals to be trained the same so they made a few more rules."

"What kind of rules?" I asked.

"Rules you will be very familiar with come this fall," Grandad replied. "First, Ranch would go from level one to level five. Foals had to start when they were one and they would usually finish around the time they turned six. Second, all Ranches had to use trainers that went through the PTG training program. Third, all foals were to be given two hours of work training, two hours of feed time, and two hours in the pasture, every day. All feed was to be hay provided by the PTG..."

"So all the foals get the exact same food, that seems fair," I observed.

“Seems so,” Grandad said. I was not sure if he was agreeing or not.

“Since there were three stations, “he continued, “work, feed, and rest; the PTG also promised to provide one training plow for every three foals enrolled at a Ranch.”

“I am sure the owners from Ranch 4 were happy to hear that!” I stated.

“You got that right,” Grandad nodded. “So, by the fall, all ten Ranches were built – including the one you passed today. And all ten put a sign over the entrance stating their purpose: *To train foals to be plow horses*. This sign told all the owners what they could expect when they dropped their foals off at Ranch.”

“So, how did it go this time?” I asked, “It seems like they solved the problems from before.”

“How did it go?” Grandad repeated. “For a few years it seemed to go well. But during my time at Ranch, some owners became unhappy.”

“Why were all the owners unhappy?” I asked.

“Not all,” Grandad corrected me. “Actually, most owners were quite pleased. But, there was a dispute that centered on the use of the plow machines. You see, the plow machines looked like a regular one-horse plow from the front – with a leather harness to attach to the foal. On the back of the machine there was a long platform with rails underneath – it was called a sled because it looked like the sleds the owners’ children used in the winter.”

“My owner’s daughter has a bright red one! She uses it on the hill by our house.” I remembered.

“Yeah, so you know what I mean,” Grandad continued. “The sled was made to carry specially made hay bales for weight. The trainer would load another bale onto the machine when he thought the foal was ready to pull more weight. The plow machines came in five sizes – the smallest, and lightest, for level one. The plow machine for level 2 was bigger and weighed the same as a level 1 machine when there were 7 bales on it. The level 3 machine was larger still, and weighed the same as a level 2 machine with 7 bales – you get the idea. The guidelines for the trainers was that each foal was to begin the year with the associated plow (first year foal had plow machine 1, second year started with plow machine 2, etc.) and, each month, one bale would be added on to the sled.”

“They still do that,” I added. “So what was the problem?”

“Again, there was no consistency in results; it depended on the trainer at a specific Ranch. Some trainers favoured the foals that were strong already, sometimes they tried to move them to a heavier plow machine – but the harnesses on the larger machines were made for older and taller foals, so it usually didn’t work out too well. Also, the belief at the time was that foals that were strong at this age did not have strong enough bones and would not be able to work past about ten years old, so trainers often just let them have extra pasture time.”

“Early ripe, early rot,” I said, remembering a phrase my owner had used.

“A few years later, that was proven to be untrue, but at the time, that’s what was taught in the trainer’s program. By the way, did you hear about the Kentucky Derby?” Grandad asked as he smiled at me out of the corner of his mouth.

“Yeah,” I looked down, embarrassed about my bold predictions. “It happened like you said, even though everyone said Sabretooth started too fast, he proved us wrong – he led from the gate and won by ten lengths.”

“So much for early ripe, early rot, huh?” he said, returning to our discussion about the Ranch. “But the strong foals were not the only ones who struggled. Trainers did not know what to do with the foals that were too weak to even pull the smallest plow with no bales.”

“So what did the trainers do with the weaker foals?”

“Most of them just gave the weaker foals extra pasture time,” Grandad replied. “This left lots of extra time on the training plows for the foals who were not overly strong and not overly weak – the normal foals. Since about half of the foals were normal, about half of the owners were happy.”

“Well,” I concluded, “if over half of the owners were happy, it sounds like a democratic victory – please the majority.”

“Obviously, most owners of the time would have agreed with you,” Grandad said, “but my owner would not have.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because,” he said as he looked into my eyes, “I was one of the weak foals.”

Slowly and quietly he continued. “Every day, when all my friends went to the work station, I was taken to the pasture. We met up at the trough at feeding time, but a lot of the foals picked on me there. ‘Why are you eating?’ they would ask. ‘You don’t do any work,’ and they

would squeeze me out from the trough. I would go back to the pasture and lie down, my stomach growling from hunger.”

I could hardly believe it. First of all that my grandad was ever weak, and secondly, that thirty years later he still got choked up when he talked about it. I could tell the wounds went deep, and I lay quietly and waited for him to compose himself.

“My owners were not the only ones to complain,” Grandad, burst out suddenly, his voice much stronger than I expected. “The owners of all the weak horses and the owners of all the strong horses complained also. Plus, there was another group of owners that complained – some owners did not want their foals to become plow horses saying, ‘we pay taxes to keep this Ranch running’ they argued, ‘and we want our foals trained to be race horses.’ It created quite a disagreement in the community and began to turn neighbor against neighbor. The PTG knew they had to do something, so they met.”

“The PTG members knew that the owners who were complaining had a legitimate argument: they all helped pay for the Ranch, so their foals should get equal opportunity for training, so they...” his voice trailed off as he looked behind me. My owner’s daughter had just stepped out of the house and was coming our way.

“...next time,” Grandad said, “I’ll tell you what they decided. Oh, and I still have to tell you about the Kaimanawa horses and the Morab horses.”

“The Ki...say that again,” I asked.

“Ky-man-ah-wah,” Grandad repeated slowly. “Can you say it?”

I didn’t have time to reply. My owner’s daughter came and took me to the barn where she gently put on my saddle and bridle – I hoped that I got someone like her for a trainer at Ranch in the fall.

As I trotted home I kept repeating it over and over under my breath, “ky-man-ah-wah, ky-man-ah-wah, ky-man-ah-wah.”

Chapter 6: The Purpose That No One Could Argue

This time when I visited Grandad it was raining, so we trotted into the barn to talk. Grandad seemed comfortable in his stall and there was just enough room for me to lie across from him in front of the stall door. Grandad seemed as eager to tell the story as I was to hear it, so he got right to it.

“The PTG members held a meeting, “Grandad began, “and, again, emotions ran high. ‘Every foal in our Ranches is valuable and deserves respect!’ one mayor shouted.

‘Maybe putting those weak ones out to pasture is respect!’ a second retorted. ‘Why subject the poor animal to a heavy plow machine that he can’t handle? He’ll only hurt himself.’

‘You wouldn’t say that if it was your foal! Maybe we need smaller machines.’

‘Smaller machines? Then we will need bigger machines for the strong foals, and what about the race horses now? How would we pay for all this?’

Back and forth they went,” Grandad continued. “Louder and louder – three or four mayors shouting at once. And then, about two hours later, one of the mayors turned and looked at an elderly mayor who had been silently listening to the debate from his seat in the corner of the room, ‘You haven’t said a word all night, what do you think?’ he asked.

The senior mayor cleared his throat but did not stand up, ‘Gentlemen,’ he said quietly but firmly, ‘perhaps we need to revisit our purpose.’

‘Our purpose?’ several wondered aloud, ‘What *is* our *purpose*?’

‘You know it,’ the elderly mayor continued. ‘It is posted above the entrance to all our Ranches: *‘To train foals to be plow horses.* Now, it seems to me that owners are asking us to stray from this original intent. Do we wish to change our desired outcome?’

The room fell silent...briefly; and to make a long story short, after more debate, it was agreed: because all owners pay into the PTG, all owners have a right to have their foals trained – whether they are weak or strong – and should not be limited to plow horse training. The owners were excited to go a new direction because only about half of the foals who entered the current training system ever successfully became plow horses anyway.

‘So what should our new purpose be?’ one mayor finally asked.

For several moments, they all looked down and contemplated the question. Then, they began to look at each other. They realized they had no idea what their new purpose should be.

‘Maybe we don’t have to re-invent the wheel,’ the elderly mayor said eventually. ‘Other regions have Ranches for their foals, too. Why don’t we find out what they are doing?’

It was agreed. Two mayors went to the region directly south, and two went east. Four weeks later the PTG assembled again to hear what the men had found. One of the mayors who went to the Southern region reported first:

‘In some ways they are like us,’ he began. ‘They have five years of foal training, and each year they add bales to plow machines just like we do. Trainers are also similar as they have to go through a three month training program before they can work at a Ranch. They have many more foals than us, but they also have many more Ranches, so enrolment per Ranch is similar. Training days are structured much the same as ours: the days are six hours long divided into working, feeding, and resting. One thing they do that we don’t is force Ranches to provide after-hours training for foals who are struggling.’

‘Aside from that last one, sounds like they are just like us,’ one mayor observed.

‘It does,’ the second mayor who visited the south now spoke, ‘but listen to their purpose: *No Foal Left Behind.*’

The mayors thought about that for a few minutes and then one spoke up. ‘Who can argue with that...sounds good to me.’

Another mayor wasn’t so sure, ‘It sounds a little negative to me. It seems like they are focused on preventing failure instead of promoting success.’

‘So you are saying that a better purpose is, *Some Foals Left Behind?*’

That got a few laughs and jeers from the group. But the opposing mayor spoke up again, ‘If you don’t want any foals left behind, you have two options: speed up the slow ones, or slow down the fast ones.’ He turned to the mayor who had revealed the purpose of training in the South and asked, ‘Which way do they do it?’

‘Well,’ he responded, ‘like I said, they have the same training procedure as us – adding bales to plows. By the end of each level, all foals have to pull their plow with five bales on it. If some can’t, their Ranch can get shut down. So, to make sure no foals are falling behind, all the Ranches constantly do strength tests and report the findings. We also noticed that some of the districts have found a bit of a loophole: since all foals need to be able to haul five bales, some districts have just switched to smaller bales.’

‘So, what about the foals that are able to pull the full five bales half-way through the year like they are supposed to – or even earlier.’

‘We saw a lot of them in the pasture. They are big, and strong, I guess, but I don’t know how much the owners will get for them when they are done training.’

‘Why?’ a mayor asked, ‘What is wrong with them? Early ripe early rot, eh?’

‘No, most of them are fat and lazy. Many of them come in to the Ranch on the first day and pull the required weight for the year. Once they meet the pulling targets, they just alternate between the trough and the pasture. Most of the trainers don’t mind though; it gives the weak foals more time on the machines so they can pass and the Ranch won’t get shut down. But, by level 4, a lot of the foals that started out strong no longer go to the Ranch because they are sick from being overweight and lack of exercise. As much as they measure achievement down there, the foals in the South are not doing well.’”

Grandad stopped and asked me, “You still keeping up?”

“Of course,” I smiled. “It is funny how their system looked so much like ours, but they had such a different purpose than we did. What about the region to the East?”

“The East got a more positive report than the South,” Grandad said. “One of the mayors who visited the Eastern region got up to speak at the meeting…”

‘The news from the East is somewhat better,’ the mayor began. ‘The Easterners organize their Ranches quite a bit differently than we do, though. Training days are shorter by an hour or two and very few owners give their foals additional training after Ranch. Perhaps the two biggest differences, however, is their trainer training program and foal tracking.’

‘What is different about the trainer program?’ one mayor asked.

‘Instead of a three month program, like us, their program is five months.’

‘Five months!’ A mayor blurted out. ‘What do they do for the last two months, lasso fence posts?’ The other mayors laughed and wondered too.

‘They learn how to do more personal foal training – meeting the unique needs of specific foals. You can see this extra knowledge in their training program as well – trainers have more flexibility to add bales to plows as they see fit, rather than as the calendar dictates.’

‘What about the tracking?’ a mayor asked. ‘We talked about that before and didn’t like the idea of segregation.’

‘For the first three years, all the foals are together, and the trainer tries to have them equally strong by the end of their third year. It is not surprising that the goal of the system in the East is *Equal Outcomes*. Equal outcomes, however, ends after year three of training. At this point, owners must choose either secondary training in strength, or secondary training in agility. Most owners whose foals are strong enough to be accepted into strength training go that route.’”

I interrupted Grandad, “Isn’t *equal outcomes* pretty much the same thing as *no foal left behind*? With equal outcomes, foals can only be trained until they reach the outcome of the weakest foal, otherwise they would have unequal outcomes. So the strength of the weakest foal basically becomes the minimum – and maximum - standard, right?”

“That is a great observation,” Grandad congratulated me. “*Equal outcomes* does have a much more positive sound, and the trainers in the East are better equipped to help weaker foals, so I guess they are pretty much the same thing; but in the East they seemed to be able to reach higher minimum standards. Plus, after level 3, foals in the East are encouraged to excel to the best of their ability in one of two disciplines; in the South, the minimum standards apply right through all the training.”

I was quite proud of myself for noticing the similarity – and I think Grandad was proud of me, too.

“Back to the meeting,” Grandad carried on. “The mayors discussed what they had heard. One mayor summed it up: ‘In the South, they use a system much like us, it would be easy to adopt their purpose – we just need to test for strength more and punish those Ranches that don’t measure up. On the other hand, in strength tests, their average scores have been falling fast – especially among the foals that should be the strongest. Even though it would be easy to adapt to this purpose, it doesn’t make sense to model our system after one that is doing even less successful than ours, does it?’

Another mayor spoke up. ‘I like how in the East there is more flexibility for trainers and less testing. I also like how the foals are home more – you can learn more from pulling a plow on a real field than you can ever learn yanking that machine up and down a training path. I also like how owners have some choice in how they want their older foals trained. The Eastern Ranches are getting good strength results, too.’

The mayors also wanted to avoid the limiting purposes of both of their neighboring regions. They felt that neither minimum standards nor equal outcomes encouraged trainers to

help all foals be the best that they could be. They mayors also realized that not all foals would become plow horses – they needed to change their purpose but were not satisfied with the purposes of either region.”

“So, what did they change it to?” I asked.

“I think you already know.” Grandad replied. “It is still written on the sign you passed today.”

“Oh yeah,” I said, “over the old purpose, now the sign now says, *To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential.*”

“*To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential,*” Grandad repeated. “Yes, the mayors were very excited; ‘who can argue with that?’ they asked themselves. The mayors patted each other on the back, ‘saying things like this will make all of our owners happy (and being an election year doesn’t hurt either)!’ They agreed to meet the following Tuesday night to discuss what changes would be needed so Ranches could begin to fulfill this great new purpose.”

Grandad stopped and looked at the door.

“What is it?” I asked, “Is someone coming?”

“I don’t think so,” he replied, “I am just wondering if I should wait until next week to finish the story. Your owner’s daughter will be leaving soon.

“Oh please keep going,” I begged. “If I have to go, you can just pick up where you leave off.”

“Okay.” Grandad smiled. I think he wanted to keep talking as much as I wanted to keep listening, but he liked hearing me plead. “The following Tuesday the ten members of the PTG met again. Gone was the tension from the previous meeting – this time all the members were giddy with excitement. One of the mayors, a carpenter by trade, began to speak...

‘Gentlemen. Gentlemen!’ he called over all the excited voices. The room finally fell silent. He continued, ‘Gentlemen, in honor of our wise decision last week to expand the purpose of our Ranches, I took the liberty of re-finishing our signs.’ He walked over to a table with a sheet over it: ‘I sanded down the old letters so you can barely see them, and wrote our new purpose – I didn’t want to use new wood for each sign as I thought that all of our resources should go towards training foals, and new signs would be an un-needed expense. I think it turned out great – but decide for yourselves...’ He pulled back the sheet and revealed his workmanship.

All the mayors gathered around the table, and the room was filled with ‘ooohs’ and ‘ahhhs.’ Two of the mayors held up the sign for all to see. Thanks to much work and lacquer, even in the poorly lit room, the sign glistened. In bold black letters, the sign declared their new purpose: ***To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential.***

‘You were right,’ the mayors agreed, ‘you can hardly see the old printing underneath – this is great work. These signs will really spruce up the entrances to the Ranches!’

‘I have refinished all of your old signs, you can take them when you leave today,’ the carpenter/mayor declared, ‘now I think we need to discuss what other changes need to be made.’”

I interrupted Grandad and asked, “Are those the signs that are still above the Ranches, like the one I saw today?”

“They are,” Grandad replied.

“They sure don’t look like you described them – all shiny and nice. And the old printing is pretty easy to see now, too. What other changes did they make?”

“Well,” Grandad answered, “they decided on a lot of changes. They liked the fact that foals from the Ranches in the East were getting good strength results so they modeled some of their policies and they also made up some of their own. To help the process, they wrote down this phrase: *For our Ranches to enable ALL foals to reach their full potential, we need to provide...*and then they made a list:

1. A safe, modern training location with ample room and enough locations to be easily accessible for all owners and their foals.
2. Modern equipment to train foals in whatever discipline their owners wish.
3. Individual feedbags containing healthy feed for each foal’s body type and training goals.
4. Professionally trained trainers in all disciplines that foals may require (three months in the trainer training program and then at least two months in specific training).
5. Appropriate trainer to foal ratio so every training moment is maximized.
6. Training appropriate to each foal’s level of achievement.”

“That sounds like some pretty major changes!” I observed.

“They were!” Grandad agreed, “And your dad was your age when they announced that these changes would take place in the fall – just in time for your dad’s first day of Ranch.

As he finished speaking, the door to Grandad's stall opened suddenly and hit me solidly in the ribs. I jumped up, startled.

"Oh, sorry!" My owner's daughter said as she quickly came over to settle me down, "I didn't know you were lying there. It is time to go."

As we walked out of the barn, I noticed the rain had stopped and the sun had broken through the clouds making the air warm and moist – summer was surely on its way. For the next week, I was anxious to finally hear about Dad at Ranch – It didn't make sense to me: with all these great changes, why did Dad refuse to talk about his training? Why was he always so depressed? Mom even said it was depression that killed him. I couldn't wait to finally get some answers.

Chapter 7: Pondering Potential

When my owner's daughter came out to get me the following week, she was surprised to see me waiting by the gate.

"You know where we are going, don't you?" she teased as she rubbed my muzzle and pressed her cheek to mine. "You are such a smart boy."

As we left home, I was feeling pretty good. Summer had arrived in full force, the morning sun was warm on my forehead and the trees and flowers were in full bloom which was nice for my eyes and my nose. It was going to be a great day; I was going to see my grandad, hear about my Dad, and I was a 'smart boy.' The good feeling, however, would not last long.

That day it was just me and my owner's daughter travelling together. About ten lengths after the sign announcing that we had reached the town limits, there was a new sign posted. The sign read:

ABSOLUTELY NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES WITHIN TOWN LIMITS

I was happy to see that the mayor was not allowing any motor vehicles in town – these new contraptions were extremely loud, their smell made me sick, and when they backfired they would sometimes make me...well sufficed to say, I was happy they were banned. A minute later, however, I was confused by another sign – it began the same as the first one, but something new had been added. This sign read:

ABSOLUTELY NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES WITHIN TOWN LIMITS

Particularly vehicles with more than four wheels

I did not feel like a smart boy anymore. Have you ever experienced something that makes you angry because it doesn't make sense? This was one of those times for me.

The first sign said that no motorized vehicles were allowed – that seemed simple enough. But with the second sign...were four wheeled vehicles okay? What about motorcycles or those three-wheeled motorized bikes some owners had? Was there a fine for motorized vehicles with four wheels or less, and a bigger fine for those with more than four wheels? That didn't seem right – 'absolutely no motorized vehicles' should have meant *absolutely no motorized vehicles*...

The whole sign-thing must have really thrown me for a loop because I couldn't remember walking through town, going up Grandad's long driveway, or even going through his owner's gate. The next thing I knew, my owner's daughter was taking off my saddle. After a quick brush, she let me into the pasture where I quickly found Grandad.

Before he could even speak, I told him about the sign.

“How can it say ‘absolutely no motorized vehicles’ but then add ‘particularly vehicles with more than four wheels’?” I asked. I then tried to answer my own question, “If it says no vehicles, that would include all vehicles. No vehicles means no vehicles.”

Grandad seemed to be amused by how worked up I was getting and he smiled at me. I was a little taken aback and realized I was not in the mood to be laughed at. “It’s not funny! I’m serious, are vehicles allowed in town or not? Those signs don’t make any sense at all!”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, “I am not laughing at you. I am smiling because you are so much like your dad. You know his owner was a lawyer, right?”

“No, I never knew that,” I replied, not having a clue what that had to do with anything.

“Let’s get a drink of water and then go lie in the shade – it is getting hot out here,” Grandad suggested.

This time he let me drink first – I think he wanted me to cool down. It must have worked, because by the time we settled into our normal spot beside the shed and under the tree, I was feeling much better. “I’m sorry I got upset, Grandad. You were going to tell me about Dad going to Ranch with all the great changes that had been announced.”

“You don’t need to apologize,” Grandad said softly, “there are so many signs – so many rules – and so many policies that owners come up with that just don’t make sense, but nobody questions them or fixes them.”

“You are right, I guess one sign not making sense is no big deal,” I agreed.

“NO!” the force of the old horse’s voice made me jump to my feet, “That is not what I am saying at all. I am saying that if no one says anything, one of two things happens: either owners live by rules that make no sense, or, perhaps even worse, owners just get used to ignoring rules and policies and then they *all* become meaningless!”

I lay back down, my heart still pounding. Grandad was obviously passionate about this...it didn’t take long to find out why.

“Your dad’s owner was a lawyer – not a farmer like most owners around here at the time, and he didn’t want your dad to become a plow horse. The lawyer knew that your dad was very intelligent and he wanted him trained to be a rider-less messenger.”

“What is a *rider-less messenger*?” I asked.

“In his profession, he often needed to send messages to nearby towns and farms, and, like you, he was not fond of motorized vehicles – although he did own the first one in these parts. Because he owned one, he knew they were unreliable – much more even than they are now – so he wanted an efficient way to send messages without him having to do it or paying someone else to do it for him.”

“Horses can do that? Travel to the farms and towns they were told to without an owner with them?” I asked.

“Some could,” Grandad replied. “To be a rider-less messenger, a horse needed three characteristics: one was a natural trait, one could be trained, and one was a combination of the two.”

“What were the three characteristics?” I wondered aloud.

“Well, first,” he replied, “a horse needs the natural ability of a good sense of direction – this cannot be taught, it is innate. Second, a horse needs to learn the location of the towns and farms. This is done through training and practice – most horses can learn this, although some learn quicker than others. And third, horses must be fast. This is a combination of natural ability and training. Good training can make just about any horse faster, but some horses will always be faster than others just because of natural abilities or physical traits – long legs, for example.”

“So, it was perfect timing for Dad to go to Ranch,” I observed, “Because he didn’t have to train to be a plow horse there anymore.”

“That is what his owner thought,” Grandad said. “So, at the start of the summer, he went to talk to the head trainer at the Ranch. The lawyer explained that he wanted his yearling – your dad – to be trained in the fall as a rider-less messenger.

‘Absolutely,’ the head trainer said, ‘last year I could not have promised this, but now we can totally accommodate your foal. You saw our new sign when you came in?’

‘I did,’ the lawyer replied. ‘To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential.’

‘Well, your foal is included in *ALL*,’ the head trainer responded joyously – it was an exciting time around the Ranch. He then motioned to the new poster on the wall. ‘This is what the PTG sent to the head trainers of every Ranch – we were all to post it in our offices. The sign read:

The purpose of the Provincial Training Group and all of its Ranches is **To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential**. To do this we will provide:

1. A safe, modern training location with ample space and sufficient locations so all foals may be appropriately trained in their local community.
2. Modern Equipment to train foals in whatever discipline their owner desires.
3. Individual feedbags containing healthy feed for each foal's body type and training goal.
4. Professionally educated trainers in all disciplines that foals may require (three months in the PTG trainer training program followed by at least two months in specific training).
5. Adequate trainer to foal ratio so every training moment is maximized.
6. Training appropriate to each foal's level of achievement."

'Does that mean their full potential as a plow horse, or what?' the lawyer asked.

The head trainer shook his head, 'There is no restriction in the policy; it just says, *their full potential*, period.'

The head trainer went on, 'For example, in the case of your colt, with this new purpose and new guidelines, I just have to tell the PTG that we have a foal that needs to be trained to be a rider-less messenger, and they will give us a trainer specifically educated to train rider-less messengers. Once the trainer is assigned, he will instruct the PTG what equipment and food your foal will need to reach his potential.'

'One trainer for every foal?' the lawyer asked in disbelief.

'Not necessarily,' replied the head trainer, 'if there are other owners that want their foals to be trained as rider-less messengers, we will group them together – to reach their full potential, it often helps to group foals from the same discipline together – they push each other.'

'I can see that,' your dad's owner nodded as he thought. 'But foals progress at different rates, like number six up there says, *training appropriate to the foal's achievement*. How can foals of different achievement be grouped together, even if they are training in the same field?'

'That is the beauty of our new policy,' the head trainer beamed as he spoke, 'we are committed to enabling ALL foals to reach their full potential.' He paused, realizing that the lawyer still wasn't comfortable.

'The reason I am concerned,' your dad's owner continued, 'is that I believe my colt has the potential to be a world-class rider-less messenger. On the other hand, his sire did not have the same sense of direction or speed to be a messenger. If we assume that my colt and someone

like his sire enroll in Ranch at the same time and in the same program, how do you know the potential of each one, measure their progress, and accommodate the needs of two such different animals who, essentially, look the same?’

‘I must admit, I haven’t had a chance to work out some of those details yet – I am waiting to hear back from the PTG, the head trainer answered, ‘I suppose it would be up to the trainer to assess the potential of each foal he trains. With a much better trainer/foal ratio this fall, it should not be too difficult for a trainer to accurately assess the two or three foals he is responsible for.’

‘As far as measuring progress,’ the head trainer continued, ‘I suppose it would depend on what field the foal is being trained in. The strength test would still apply to those training to be plow horses; but for those training as messengers, jumpers, long-distance travelers, and many other disciplines, the strength test would be useless. So, again, it would be up to each specific trainer to provide progress assessments for the foals they train.’

Sensing the lawyer was still not convinced, the head trainer continued, ‘If this helps reassure you, we would be violating our own policy if we did anything that did not enable *your* colt to reach his full potential. If, to reach his full potential, he needs group work, we have to provide it; if he needs individual training, we have to provide it. It is a far-reaching promise, that’s for sure! In all my years as a trainer and administrator, I have never seen a policy so committed to the success of every individual foal.’

Your dad’s owner just nodded.

The head trainer went on: ‘This new policy changes everything, the rigid schedule of work/feed/rest and repeat, that our parent’s foals were forced into will be replaced by programs individually tailored to each foal. Plus, they are going to a shorter training day to give owners a chance to introduce foals into the chosen field. You, for example, will be able to send your foal with experienced messengers so he can learn the region. This is another way we enable ALL foals to reach their potential.’

‘What’s more,’ added the head trainer, ‘all this is free. The PTG is paying for everything. There are still some owners out there who don’t understand what we are offering so they are going to keep their colts and fillies at home. They pay their taxes either way, so I have no idea why they would deprive their foals of solid, professional, guaranteed training. Not properly training a colt borders on animal cruelty, in my opinion. I hope these owners will be held accountable when their untrained foals start diluting our quality breeds.’

‘I don’t know about all that,’ your dad’s owner replied as he stood up and put on his hat to leave. ‘Almost sounds too good to be true. But with all the new foals coming to Ranch this fall, you are going to be one busy man! Good luck! And thank you. My foal will be here in the fall.’”

“It did sound like a pretty sweet deal,” I agreed with what Dad’s owner had said.

Grandad nodded, “Even though he agreed to send your dad to Ranch, your dad’s owner still didn’t understand how the new system was going to work. By the time he got home, he was visibly upset.

‘What’s wrong?’ his wife asked, as she looked up from the dishes she was drying at the sink. ‘The Ranch doesn’t look good for the fall?’

‘Actually,’ he replied, as he sat down heavily at the kitchen table, ‘the Ranch *looks* the same as always, but it *sounds* perfect: individualized training and diet, a foal to trainer ratio of only two or three to one, new equipment, training based on achievement and designed for each foal to maximize its potential. It seems as though the whole system is designed to ensure the success of our foal.’

‘Those monsters! I can see why you are upset.’ she said sarcastically, ‘And the PTG is paying for all this? We should get a lawyer!’

The owner smiled at her sarcasm. ‘Doesn’t it sound too good to be true: *to enable ALL foals to reach their full potential?*’ he asked his wife.

‘What, exactly, is bothering you?’ his wife asked as she wiped her hands on a tea towel and sat down across the table from her husband.

‘First off, *ALL* is a pretty big promise. You remember a few years back when so many foals were born lame? The vet said that it was possible for them to walk, but it would have taken tens of thousands of dollars in medical expenses and, in the end, most of the foals would never have been able to work anyway. If that happened now, since they had the *potential* to walk, rather than put them down, if the owners chose to take them to the Ranch, the PTG committed themselves to do whatever it takes.’

‘Think of that!’ the owner’s wife said thoughtfully.

‘And,’ the owner continued, ‘remember that colt a couple years ago that was a giant? By three years old he was pulling around those level 5 machines like they were toys. His owner just

pulled him out of the Ranch because they couldn't help him anymore. Now, though, the Ranch would have to buy bigger and bigger machines so the colt could reach his potential.'

'The PTG,' he continued, 'is committing to help the lame foals, the giant foals, and every foal in between...*ALL* foals to reach their full potential.'

The wife sat back in her chair and asked, 'Who decides the potential of each foal?'

'I asked the head trainer that,' the owner replied. 'He said that the trainers will have extra training so they will be able to do it.'

'I wonder how you measure the potential of a foal?' she asked, more to herself than her husband.

'I have no idea,' he answered, 'but even if he could...let's just say that when a yearling arrived at Ranch for his first day, the trainer was able to assess the foal's pulling strength, after five years of training, to be one thousand pounds. Let's assume this is a completely accurate assessment of his potential – the trainer got it exactly right.'

The owner stopped for a minute to collect his thoughts, then continued. 'The trainer would put the foal on a training program that would enable him to reach his full potential – something like a two hundred pound strength increase every year for five years. Year one goes as planned – the colt increases his strength by two hundred pounds. But what happens if over the summer, the colt sprains his knee and can hardly walk for four months – does the trainer adjust the colt's potential? Or what if the colt gets sold to another owner and the new owner beats the foal – surely this would impact the foal's potential – does the trainer even know about this? Even if potential can be measured, it would change on practically a daily basis - I just don't believe in the idea of a yearling having one, fixed, potential.

'I agree with that,' his wife nodded. 'There are just so many factors that are out of the Ranch's control – most of which the trainers wouldn't even know about – let alone adjust for.'

'Another thing,' the owner went on, 'this example only took into account pulling strength. What if, in addition to having the potential to pull one thousand pounds, that same colt had the potential to be a racehorse and run, what? Forty miles per hour. However, for the colt to reach his potential as a racehorse, he would need to be trained differently than if he was training to meet his potential as a plow horse. The colt could not achieve both potentials – in their statement to enable *ALL* foals to reach their full potential, the PTG makes no allowance for competing potentials that are mutually exclusive. How will they account for this?'

‘I have no idea. Surely they thought this through when they created their purpose statement,’ his wife responded.

‘One more thing,’ the lawyer continued his rant, ‘remember how the sire of our foal was weak and the big horses bullied him at the trough?’

‘Yes, it is amazing how cruel animals can be – even to their own kind,’ his wife replied.

The lawyer went on, ‘And if you recall, there was that one four year-old colt that kicked the poor weak yearling in the side and broke two of his ribs.’”

I looked at Grandad. He had told me he had been picked on, but he never said anything about having his ribs broken. He did not return my look. I didn’t have time to comment because Grandad quickly moved on.

“‘That poor thing hobbled around for days and it got even weaker.’ His wife shook her head in sadness as she thought back to the sight of the young white foal stumbling around the pasture, unable to even lie down. ‘I also remember that the trainer got in trouble because he had been teaching that four year-old how to kick more effectively – what does kicking have to do with being a plow horse? I don’t know what that trainer was thinking!’

‘As strange as it sounds,’ the lawyer said, ‘under the new policy, the trainer would have been congratulated for being such an effective trainer.’

‘What do you mean, an *effective* trainer? He taught the foal how to kick better, how is that effective?’ the owner’s wife asked incredulously.

The lawyer answered evenly, ‘Think about it, an effective trainer is one who enables the trainee to successfully accomplish the set goal, right?’

His wife nodded hesitantly. He went on.

‘Back then, the goal was to train foals to be plow horses – and like you said, kicking has nothing to do with plowing. But now, the purpose is to enable ALL foals to reach their full potential. All foals have some potential as kickers. So not only would the trainer be expected to help this foal reach his potential as a kicker, the trainer is *obligated* to help ALL foals reach their potential as kickers.’

‘That is ridiculous’ his wife argued, ‘foals should not be trained to hurt each other.’

‘First of all,’ the lawyer countered, ‘horses don’t just kick to hurt each other; horses that can kick hard have been used by firefighters to knock down doors of burning buildings. But more to the point here, the PTG has made no value judgment as to which potentials are good and

should be fostered, and which potentials are bad and should be curtailed. And like this example, training a foal to effectively kick may turn out to be bad, or it may turn out to be good – even to save an owner’s life - who can tell? To avoid making value judgments, I suppose, they have said they will enable ALL foals to reach their full potential, period.’

‘What about their potential for chewing through their ropes when they are tethered? Or, what about their potential for escaping under fences? Or, ‘she looked directly at her husband and asked, ‘what about their potential for bucking off riders – like our nine year-old daughter?’

‘I totally see what you are saying.’ The lawyer put his hand over his wife’s hand. ‘Based on their policies, they are obligated to train foals to reach their potential – even if that potential is generally considered to be harmful.’

The owner’s wife looked at her husband, and said quietly, ‘I can see why you were upset when you got home. This makes no sense to me, and it scares me to think that we are sending our yearling to a place where other foals are learning effective ways to hurt him, or, worse still, our daughter. At least he will be with other foals his own age and his own size.’

‘Um, no, that may not be entirely true,’ the owner said slowly.

‘What do you mean?’ his wife asked.

‘When I was talking to the head trainer, he said that if foals are grouped at all, it would be with those similar in achievement – and since our colt is pretty advanced for his age, I imagine he will spend most of his group time with foals that are older and bigger than he is.’

‘You are kidding? I like the idea of Ranch less and less,’ she said. ‘I mean, I like the idea of our colt reaching his full potential so he can help you with your messages or maybe so we can sell him for top dollar, but is he really going to reach his potential at the Ranch? The only reasons I am going to go along with this, is because almost every owner I know is sending their foals to Ranch. So, if the other owners are confident that the Ranches and the trainers will do a good job, I guess I will just have to trust that the PTG has all this stuff figured. I don’t want to be one of those owners who think that nothing is good enough for her precious animals. Besides, the mayors wouldn’t go to all this time and expense just to do harm to foals in their own community. That would make no sense at all.’

She went to say something else but reconsidered for a moment. Looking down, she whispered to herself, ‘I am sure they have it all figured out.’

‘Well,’ the owner conceded, ‘if they have all this figured out, they are smarter men than me!’

‘Smarter than you?’ his wife chided. ‘Impossible.’”

He smiled at his wife, still unsure of what the fall would bring.

When Grandad paused, I nearly burst. I bombarded him with questions: “So, what happened in the fall, when Dad went to Ranch? Was it as great as they said it would be? What was his potential measured at? How did they make it so he could reach his potential in everything? Did he learn how to kick?”

“We’ll pick up there next week,” Grandad replied as he closed his eyes, “I am sorry, but I am so tired...”

His words trailed off as he fell asleep. I had no choice but to wait.

Chapter 8: Paying for the Promise

“‘Are you men crazy?’ The accountant screamed at the members of the PTG after he heard of the mayors’ new plans.” Grandad began this week’s story with a bang!

“‘Better facilities? Specific equipment for each discipline? Specific food for each foal? Almost doubling the length of trainer training? Not to mention, specifically trained trainers for every discipline?’ The mayors looked at the floor as the young accountant berated them.

‘If we were to actually fund this program, you would have to raise the tax-rate in this region to about two hundred percent!’ the accountant went on. ‘Where did you suppose the money was going to come from to do everything necessary to – what did you say? He looked out the window to the Ranch entrance across the street from where they were meeting and read the sign out loud, ‘... to *enable ALL foals to reach their full potential?*’

The accountant looked around the room, staring questioningly at each mayor, one at a time. Not one of the mayors made eye contact...they realized he was right. The last mayor the accountant looked at was the eldest mayor who had talked about the PTG purpose in a previous meeting. The accountant fixed his gaze – and his wrath - on this man, who suddenly looked very old.

‘You,’ the accountant pointed at the old man and said, ‘you of all people should have known better. You have been a mayor forever. If nothing else, you know you can’t tax people more than what they earn!’

The room fell completely silent. All the mayors sat, dejected. All of the excitement that had filled the room one short month ago was long forgotten as each man wondered what they had been thinking, and contemplated exactly how they were going to get out of this mess. The wooden signs were posted at the entrance of each Ranch, the posters pledging the commitment of the PTG were prominently displayed in the offices of each head trainer, and promises had been made to concerned owners. Including your dad’s owner,” Grandad said. “There was no going back - and, as the accountant made very clear – no going forward, either.

The eyes of every mayor followed the stare of the accountant at the mayor who had become the target of the accountant’s rage...they felt sorry for the old man, but even more, each one felt relieved that it was not he who had to answer for the promises of the Provincial Training Group.

The young accountant, seemingly enjoying his position of authority over such powerful men, gained confidence from their dejection and silence. He walked up to where the old man was sitting and stopped, smugly looking down on a mayor who was at least three decades his elder.

Growing tired of waiting for the old mayor to speak, the accountant spoke again. 'If you implement even half of what is written on that poster, paying for it will require every cent of tax money our government collects; soon, every town in this region will go broke, the PTG will be bankrupt, and every single Ranch will shut down. Either that,' the accountant paused, and then added, 'or you will have to raise taxes so high that all the owners will move away, the towns will go broke, the PTG will go bankrupt, and the Ranches will shut down.'

The accountant paused again and looked around the quiet room. 'There is one more option,' he finally said. Still none of the mayors looked up. 'You could change things back to the way they were and just train foals to be plow horses.'

A few of the mayors slowly nodded and began to look at each other to confirm they were all in agreement. Finally one spoke up. 'I don't like the idea of going back to our old ways, I was so proud to be a part of a system that would enable ALL foals to reach their full potential – I mean, I have foals, I was excited to send them to the Ranch – imagine how much could be done with a team of horses who are all at their full potential.'

The mayor paused as they all silently mourned their loss. 'But,' he added, 'if this type of system would bankrupt us – not to mention cost us our jobs – then I guess we have no choice, do we?'

Again, the room fell silent as the mayor who had been speaking sat back down in his folding chair. Although it seemed they were all in agreement with what must be done, no one wanted to be the next one to speak.

'Excuse me,' the old mayor said to the accountant who was still standing over him.

The accountant backed up slightly as the old mayor slowly stood up. Because the accountant did not yield much room, the two men stood nearly toe to toe. Normally somewhat hunched over, the old man raised himself to his full height. The other mayors silently grinned at the scene before them: when he stood straight, the old mayor was nearly a full head taller than the accountant, and so the old man's long grey beard hung directly in the eyes of the younger man.

Both men seemed frozen in this comical position – neither wanting to give up ground to the other. Finally, the accountant could no longer stand it; he stepped back and rubbed his itchy eyes. He then turned without a word, and walked to a nearby vacant chair and sat down. He did not look up but was suddenly engrossed in removing a piece of lint that had settled just above his right knee.

Without acknowledging the accountant, the old mayor turned to the other nine mayors and said, ‘In spite of our grand and honourable intentions, it would seem that the actions necessary to achieve our desired outcome would bankrupt our communities. However, going back to the way things were will cost most of us our jobs as mayors. For me, I am not concerned about losing my office as this will be my final term as mayor, but for most of you, this decision may crush your future political plans.’

The mayors knew that what he was saying was true.

One mayor spoke up, ‘So, our choices are bankrupt our towns – and lose our jobs; or, we can revoke our new plan – and lose our jobs. Nice.’

Another mayor added, ‘Obviously, like most of you, I need this job and the extra money it pulls in. But, more than that, I had great plans for our town – this new Ranch policy was just one of many new initiatives I started! Sure, if I don’t get re-elected, it would be a loss to me personally, but our whole town will suffer, too.’

The mayors all nodded in agreement, there were mutterings:

‘Yeah, it would be everyone’s loss.’

‘If I wasn’t mayor – I don’t know who would take over.’

‘We just started building a new post office and paving some streets, that would all stop.’

‘It is better for everyone if we stay on as mayors.’

When the room settled down, the old mayor continued. ‘Yes, it is true; it would be a great loss to each of your communities if you were to be voted out. And why would you be voted out? Because you wanted the best for your local owners and their horses – because you had grand intentions! I ask you, is it better to have *no* intentions?’

‘NO!’ all the mayors shouted in unison.

‘But what do we do?’ One owner cried out, ‘If we leave our purpose, we are bankrupt, if we change it, we are untrustworthy – like was said before, either way we lose our jobs.’

All the mayors fell silent and looked up at the old mayor.

The old mayor smiled a knowing smile. ‘There is a way,’ he said.

‘What way? How?’ a mayor asked.

Before acknowledging the question, the old mayor turned to the accountant and said flatly, ‘You may go.’

‘What?’ The accountant argued, ‘I am in charge of the finances – I need to be here! You are going to bankrupt the communities! You...’

‘You are in charge of *reporting* the finances,’ the old man calmly corrected him, ‘and you have done so. You have given us our budget – three percent more than last year.’

‘Three *point two* percent more,’ the accountant retorted.

‘Ah, yes, three *point two* percent,’ the old mayor repeated condescendingly, ‘I stand corrected. However, your job here is done,’ he added sternly, ‘and may I remind you, everything that was said and done in this meeting is confidential. Understood?’

‘Yes,’ the accountant muttered meekly. He gathered his papers and his brief case and walked toward the door.

The old mayor perked up and, as if saying good-bye to an old friend, smiled and said, ‘Thank you so much for coming.’

The accountant did not reply. He left the room without looking back.

Grandad stopped talking. I looked up at him, afraid we were done for the day.

“I need a drink!” he declared as he slowly stood up. I could hear his aged bones cracking.

We walked to the water trough and each took a long drink. Grandad smacked his lips and said, “All this yakking sure makes me thirsty!”

We each took one more short drink and then went back to our shady spot.

“So, what happened once they kicked out that smug accountant?” I asked.

Grandad picked up right where he left off, “Well, obviously the other mayors had no idea what the old mayor was thinking, and they were as anxious as you are to hear his plan.

The old mayor walked up to the front of the room where there was a large chalk board. He found a small piece of white chalk – almost completely worn down from use, and drew a line vertically down the middle. He took a step to the left hand side of the board and then turned to the other mayors, and said,

‘Who remembers what our purpose was before we changed it?’

It took a moment for anyone to reply and then one of the mayors, the former carpenter who had re-finished the signs, spoke up, 'I guess I should know this, I spent two weeks trying to sand it off of the signs.'

A few in the room gave an awkward laugh, the atmosphere had been very tense and they were happy for a little levity.

'The purpose was,' the carpenter mayor continued, '*To Train Foals to be Plow Horses.*'

As he spoke, the old mayor wrote the words on the top of the left hand side of the chalkboard.

'Now, what actions did we take to make this happen?' the old mayor asked.

As the other mayors shouted out the answers, underneath where he had written the purpose, the old mayor wrote what each mayor said:

'We provided a Ranch.'

'Three stations: Two hours work, two hours feed, two hours rest.'

'We put all the trainers through a three month training program.'

'One trainer for every level, plus a trainer at the trough and a trainer in the pasture.'

'We provided five sizes of plow machines...and bales for weight.'

'We provided feed – one kind – and every Ranch got the same.'

There was a pause as the mayors thought.

'Anything else?' the old mayor asked as he stepped back from the chalk board.

The mayors read the list and slowly shook their heads, 'No,' one said, 'I think that pretty much covers it.'

Another mayor spoke up, 'The thing is,' he slowly began, 'this was our purpose, and these were our actions, but frankly...' his voice trailed off.

'What?' the old mayor asked.

'Well, the system was failing. Remember? That was one of the reasons we changed our purpose – the normal foals were doing okay – not as good as they used to, but better than the foals in the Southern region we inspected. But the weak foals and the strong foals were doing worse and worse, and many of their owners stopped sending their foals to Ranch. The system was failing - that is why owners were complaining.'

'How do we know they were doing worse?' the old mayor asked.

‘Every year they were strength tested – the results were there in black and white. If the system had been successful, the outcomes would match our purpose – and ours did not – many of the foals were not becoming plow horses.’

‘Yes,’ the old mayor agreed as he stroked his beard, ‘actions don’t consult us about our intentions before they create outcomes, do they? We will come back to this.’

The old mayor walked to the back of the room and picked up a large roll of paper and some tape that was on a back table. As he returned to the front of the room he spoke.

‘On my way to the meeting tonight, I stopped by the office of our town’s head trainer and borrowed this from him. I think you are all somewhat familiar with it by now...’

The old mayor taped the top of the paper to the top of the right hand side of the chalk board. He then let go of the paper allowing the poster to unfurl. The mayors all groaned as they saw what it was:

The purpose of the Provincial Training Group and all of its Ranches is **To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential**. To do this we will provide:

1. A safe, modern training location with ample room and enough locations to be easily accessible for all owners and their foals.
2. Modern equipment to train foals in whatever discipline their owners wish.
3. Individual feedbags containing healthy feed for each foal body type and goal.
4. Professionally trained trainers in all disciplines that foals may require (three months in the trainer training program and then at least two months in specific training).
5. Appropriate trainer to foal ratio so every training moment is maximized.
6. Training appropriate to each foal’s level of achievement.

‘No wonder the accountant was so upset,’ one mayor said as he read the poster and shook his head slowly, ‘to actually do these things would cost a fortune, what were we thinking?’

‘We had good intentions – ALL foals reaching their potential – I mean, it doesn’t get any better than that!’

‘I know but look...’ the mayor replied as he got up and walked up to the poster, picking up a black marker on the way, ‘here is what this poster would look like if we took only the actions we could financially afford...’

The mayor proceeded to stroke out words on the poster. When he finished, he stepped back and all the mayors looked at what he had done. The poster now read:

The purpose of the Provincial Training Group and all of its Ranches is **To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential**. To do this we will provide:

1. A safe, ~~modern~~ training location ~~with ample room and enough locations to be easily accessible for all owners and their foals~~.
2. ~~Modern~~ equipment to train foals ~~in whatever discipline their owners wish~~.
3. ~~Individual feedbags containing healthy~~ feed for each foal's ~~body type and goal~~.
4. Professionally trained trainers ~~in all disciplines that foals may require (three months in the trainer training program and then at least two months in specific training)~~.
5. Appropriate trainer to foal ratio ~~so every training moment is maximized~~.
6. Training appropriate to each foal's level of achievement.

The mayors sat quietly and stared at the poster, 'There is hardly anything left!' one finally said.

Another mayor was confused, 'Number five?' he asked. '...The way Ranches have always been run is with one trainer in each level, one at the trough, and one in the pasture – for a total of seven trainers. But this system was made when there were maybe twenty-five foals in a Ranch. This fall there will be nearly one hundred foals in most Ranches. You heard the weasel accountant – we don't have the money to quadruple our staff! I think you should cross off all of number five.'

'Read it again,' the mayor with the marker said, '*Appropriate* trainer to foal ratio.'

'I don't follow,' the other mayor said.

'Who defines appropriate?' the mayor with the marker asked.

'Um, us – the PTG - I guess. So how are we defining it?'

'We are not. Or, perhaps more accurately, we can define it as *what we are currently doing*. Who is to say that what we are doing is not appropriate?'

'So,' the seated mayor summarized, 'an appropriate trainer to foal ratio is the ratio we are currently using?'

'Exactly,' said the mayor with the marker, 'and you will notice that also applies to number six as well – appropriate training is the training we are providing.' With that, the mayor put down the marker and returned to his chair.

The old mayor returned to the chalk board and said, “Appropriate is what we are currently doing’...Interesting. Very interesting. That may be useful later on. But for now, let’s focus on how the poster looks with the *actions we can afford* adjustments...notice anything?’

The mayors stared at the board for several minutes. ‘I don’t see what you are getting at,’ one mayor finally spoke up.

‘Here, let me help you,’ the old mayor said as he walked up to the poster taped to the board. He placed his left hand on the top of the poster, holding it in place, while with his right hand he carefully ripped the poster just below the purpose statement.

Holding the ‘actions’ section, he said to the nearest mayor, ‘Come up here and write down on the chalkboard everything from this poster that is not crossed off. Write it just underneath the purpose.’

The mayor went up to the board and did as he was instructed. When he was finished he returned to his seat. The old mayor let go of the paper in his hand and it fell to the floor. With hardly a noise, it loosely curled itself back up; almost completely returning to the rolled-up tube that it had been in when the mayor had retrieved it from the table. After watching the paper fall, all eyes returned to the board, which now read:

<p>To Train Foals to be Plow Horses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We provided a Ranch. 2. Three stations: Two hours work, two hours feed, two hours rest. 3. We put all the trainers through a three month training program. 4. One trainer for every level, plus a trainer at the trough and a trainer in the pasture. 5. We provided five sizes of plow machines...and bales for weight. 6. We provided feed – one kind – and every Ranch got the same. 	<p>The purpose of the Provincial Training Group and all of its Ranches is To Enable ALL Foals To Reach Their Full Potential. To do this we will provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A safe training location. 2. Equipment to train foals. 3. Food for each foal. 4. Professionally trained trainers (three months in the trainer training). 5. Appropriate trainer to foal ratio. 6. Training appropriate to each foal's level of achievement.
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It did not take long for the mayors to see what the old mayor was showing them – the mayor who had initially crossed the words off of the poster with the marker spoke for everyone:

‘They are pretty much the same thing!’

‘Indeed,’ the old mayor nodded in agreement, ‘and that should not come as too big of a surprise – doing what we were doing, we used up our budget every year – in other words, we were doing all we could afford to do. Changes were minimal as we had little money for capital purchases. It is logical, then, that the cheapest way to continue is the way we have always done things. Anything else costs money...money we do not have.’

‘So, when the second list was amended to *things we can afford to do*, the old mayor continued, ‘we basically concluded that all we can afford to do is what we have been doing.’”

As we heard my owner's daughter coming, Grandad said, “The mayors adjourned for the night and agreed to meet the following week...just as we will have to do.”

Chapter 9: Inclusion is the Answer

When I entered the pasture the following week, I knew something was not right. Grandad was not by the gate and, even though it was a hot day, he was not at the trough or in our shady spot. I nudged the barn door open and could hear raspy breathing in the direction of Grandad's stall.

I slowly approached his stall, somewhat fearful of what I might find. As I went through the small door, I saw Grandad lying in the far corner. His breathing was shallow and unsteady and even though his eyes were half open, he showed no sign that he knew I was there. I slowly approached him and nickered softly while I nudged his neck with my muzzle.

"Grandad?" I whispered quietly.

"Grandad, are you awake?"

His raspy breathing continued, unchanged. He did not move.

I raised my hoof to his ribs – just in front of his hind leg. If there is one thing a horse who has had owners responds to, it is a kick to the ribs. I was gentle, but firm.

"Grandad!" I neighed loudly as I brought my hoof down on his side.

"What? What?" he said as he raised his startled head but did not stand up.

"It's me," I said, "Sorry about that. You looked like you were sleeping, but...your breathing was funny and your eyes were half open..."

He took a moment to gather himself and then replied, "If my eyes were half open, that is half more than most horses my age! We'll see what you look like in thirty years!"

He smiled at me and said, "Help me up, I need some water."

I went around behind him and used my poll to push his body upward. I had not noticed how thin he had become. His bony ribs and back hurt my head.

We did not go outside. We just went to the small trough in the barn and each took a drink. As we returned to Grandad's stall, he smacked his lips and water dripped from his mouth. He lay back down in his stall and looked at me as I stretched out next to him. A moment later he spoke:

"I have really enjoyed our visits these past few weeks, you know?"

"Me too," I replied. It was not like Grandad to get sentimental.

"I know I won't be around much longer," he went on, "but I want to tell you about your dad...and his owner...and their experience with the Ranch. It was not good."

“If you are too tired...” I said, my eyes watering.

“No. No, I want to tell you,” he insisted, “but before we get to your dad, I have to finish up from last week. Then maybe we could continue next week with your dad. Would that be okay? You trust me to hang on that long?” He winked at me, lightening the mood a little.

“Oh, Grandad,” I said as I swatted his hind legs with my tail, “Mom says you’ll never die – you are too ornery.”

We laughed until Grandad started coughing. Once he composed himself, he picked up right where he left off the week before – his body might have been deteriorating but his mind was not.

“The following week the mayors met back in the same room and the writing was still on the board. The bottom half of the poster also remained untouched, lying loosely rolled up on the floor. Obviously no one had used the room since they had met there seven days earlier. All of the mayors had spent the week thinking about the two lists: each list had a different purpose, yet the lists were essentially the same.

One of the young mayors was first to voice his concern. Although he was speaking to everyone, he looked at the old mayor, addressing him specifically.

‘These lists,’ he said, motioning to the board, ‘are really interesting, but I would like to get back to our problem. If we keep our new purpose – our intention of having all foals reach their potential, we will go bankrupt, and I will be out of a job. If we rescind our purpose, owners will not re-elect me, and I will be out of a job. As you said last week, you are not looking for re-election, but most of us here...well, I had planned to make a career out of this.’

The young mayor paused. Many of the other mayors nodded in agreement, so he went on,

‘You said there might be a way to get out of this. We want to know – we need to know – and we need to know fast – what that way is.’

The young mayor was respectful, but desperate – it was obvious in his quivering voice.

‘I understand,’ the old man said as he stood up and walked over to the young mayor. He spoke like a father speaks to his son. He paused as he gently squeezed the young mayor’s shoulder and slowly gazed around the room – all the mayors felt as if it were their shoulders being squeezed. Everyone felt reassured and the room relaxed.

The mayor patted the man's shoulder and returned to the front of the room, speaking as he walked.

'I have been in politics a long, long time and there are certain things you can count on with owners.' He paused briefly, "For instance, it is a universal truth that owners want more services. Simple enough – who doesn't want more services? More hospitals, better roads, health care...Ranches for their foals – that makes sense. However, at the same time they want more services, they also want lower taxes.'

Every mayor in the room nodded in agreement as they mentally recounted their own experiences with this challenging political paradox.

'Another problematic situation we face as we try to please our electorate is this: most owners acknowledge that because of breeding, or owner care, or luck, or whatever, every foal is unique, each foal is better suited to a certain type of work, and every foal has different potential. In spite of this, many owners get upset when the strongest foals are *too much* stronger than the weaker ones. We have seen this in our Ranches.'

'What do you mean?' one mayor asked.

'Well, let me give you an example,' the old mayor replied. 'Two yearling colts enter Ranch on the same day. One colt has a three-generation plow horse pedigree, a muscular body, and a mind that seems as though he was born knowing how to handle a plow. The second colt was sired by a wild horse, is a strong swimmer and jumper, but is not suited to plowing.'

'Up until now,' he continued, 'the strong horse would meet his level's weight pulling requirements and then spend the rest of the year in the pasture while the trainer tried to help the weaker colt learn to pull so he could meet his requirements.'

'Some owners see this as neglect and a waste. The owners of the strong foals even call it abuse. And, in the end, Ranches produce few, if any, really strong plow horses. Most graduates were mediocre, at best. This brought about the call for treating each foal as unique and worthy of the training it would require so they could become the best they could. The reason we chose the purpose of having all foals reach their potential was because no owner could argue with that intention – it is noble and honorable and respectful to every foal...and to every owner.'

'So back to my example,' he went on. 'Let's say the first foal has the potential to increase his weight pulling by ten bales per year while the second foal has the potential to increase his weight pulling by five bales a year. If the Ranch enables each foal to reach their

potential, by the time they graduate five years later, the stronger colt will be able to pull fifty bales and the weaker will be able to pull twenty-five. In spite of the fact they both reached their potential, what would happen?’

Everyone knew the answer, one mayor said it, ‘Owners of the weaker colt – and others – would complain because of the large disparity between their pulling abilities. There would be lots of talk about the *achievement gap* and about *equality*.’

‘So do you see it?’ the old mayor asked. ‘If we promise to enable all foals to reach their full potential – and do what it takes to make it happen – we will have equality...but the equality is not measured in weight pulling, it measured by individual potential. In other words, all foals will have equally met the desired outcome – reaching their potential.’

‘But because all foals are different,’ one mayor concluded, ‘the actual weight amounts will be different...right?’

‘Exactly,’ the old mayor replied, ‘In fact, the better our Ranches are at enabling ALL foals to reach their full potential, the wider the gap will become between the strongest and the weakest foal. And, the wider the gap becomes...’

‘The more owners will complain,’ three mayors completed his sentence in unison.

There was a pause as the mayors thought this over.

The old mayor spoke again, ‘Let me summarize: First, Owners want more services and to pay less tax. And second, due to genetics, environment, and circumstances, all foals have vastly different potential. Owners want Ranches to enable ALL foals to reach their full potential, while simultaneously wanting to eliminate any achievement gaps.’

‘Maybe I don’t want to make a career out of this after all,’ the young mayor said as he rubbed his face.

‘Don’t give up yet,’ the old mayor smiled as he spoke, ‘remember, perception is reality. I have an idea.’

He walked up to the left side of the chalk board and erased the words *To Train Foals to be Plow Horses*, and, overtop, wrote, *To enable ALL foals to reach their full potential*. He left the list of actions underneath unchanged.

The mayors considered what the old mayor had done. Some seemed to understand, others did not.

The old mayor explained, ‘Let’s start with the second paradox. With different potentials, equal achievement is impossible – yet that is what owners want. So this way, we stick with our proposed changes to the purpose – thus saving our jobs – but by keeping all of our actions the same, average will become the norm, in other words, foals will have similar – albeit mediocre - outcomes. Plus, we do not bankrupt the towns – thus saving our jobs.’

‘But,’ one mayor argued, ‘if we just keep doing the same things, how will each foal reach their potential...as it was, we weren’t producing many good plow horses – just a bunch of mediocre ones, and all the ones that weren’t mediocre either quit or were removed from the Ranches.’

‘Also,’ he went on, ‘how will we know if foals are reaching their potential? I think we had hoped that the additional training for our trainers would enable them to determine potential, but we can’t afford that now. So how do we know they are reaching their potential?’

‘If no one can measure potential, how do we know they are *not* reaching it?’ the old mayor responded.

‘I’m not sure owners will go for this,’ another mayor lamented.

‘This brings us to the first universal truth,’ the old mayor said: ‘more services and less tax. Remember, the accountant indicated that in this upcoming year we would receive an additional three percent in the budget?’

‘Three *point two* percent,’ one mayor corrected, mocking the accountant. A few mayors chuckled, one rolled his eyes.

‘Ah yes,’ the old mayor said, ‘three *point two* percent, how could I forget? Anyway, if we don’t make any changes to our Ranches, we should be able to operate on about the same amount as we did last year – we may just have to put off a few things. I know some of the Stables are beginning to need repair, but rather than fix the cracks, we could just paint over them – make everything look new and shiny...Then, as mayors, we can put most of that three point two percent into our town operating budgets and announce to the owners that we are able to reduce their taxes this year.’

‘Your plan will reduce achievement gaps, lower taxes, and perhaps sidestep potential; but what about more services?’ one mayor asked.

The old mayor replied, ‘enabling ALL foals to reach their potential *is* an increased service. We just have to sell them on a means that they will accept – a means that does not cost us any money.’

‘That should be easy,’ one mayor said sarcastically.

Even the old mayor was stumped. The room went quiet once again.

Finally one mayor – obviously a shy man – stood up to speak.

‘I’m not sure this applies,’ he said hesitantly, ‘because it has nothing to do with horses or Ranches, or even foal training, but I may have an idea.

‘We are looking for ideas, what have you got?’ the old mayor encouraged.

‘Well,’ the shy mayor went on, ‘three summers ago, my oldest daughter took swimming lessons at the town pool. She had taken lessons the four previous summers and had reached Level Five – oh, I guess that is kind of like Ranch – anyway, when we went to sign her up for Level Five, they said that they no longer grouped kids by their levels, they were now grouped by age.’

‘Sorry to interrupt,’ one mayor spoke up, ‘but why did they make the change from achievement-grouping to age-grouping?’

‘Sorry,’ the shy mayor responded, ‘I should have mentioned that. Apparently, there had been some complaints from parents whose kids were older but not strong swimmers – the kids were embarrassed to be put with kids three or four years younger. Plus, for some of the young swimmers who were very advanced, they had a tough time practicing life-saving techniques with older kids who were fifty pounds heavier.’

Another mayor interrupted, ‘How old was your daughter?’

The shy mayor thought for a moment, ‘I guess I should know this...she just turned seventeen, so, she was...fourteen at the time. So, she was going to be grouped with all the fourteen year olds. The lady at registration said that while there were specific outcomes for the fourteen year old class (learning the back stroke and the breast stroke), the class instructor would teach each child according to their ability – it was called an *inclusive* program. We were happy to hear that the instructor could differentiate her instruction because our daughter already knew how to do the back stroke and had been looking forward to learning the breast stroke.’

‘Anyway, we did not think much more about it,’ the shy mayor recounted. ‘Lessons were every day, and initially she was very happy – she got to be with all of her friends - even though

they were mostly just going into Level Four, and she was going into Level Five – there are ten levels, you know.’

‘After about a week, however, my daughter started to complain to us that there were a few boys in her class that were taking all the instructor’s attention, and so my daughter and a couple of her friends just sat on the side for most of the time.’

The shy mayor briefly paused and then added, ‘My daughter was a decent swimmer – average or maybe a bit above – and she had never complained about an instructor before, so I decided to go watch her lesson the following day. I saw for myself what an inclusive program looks like.’

‘There were three boys that caught my eye immediately. One was a smaller boy who sat on the deck beside the shallow end and would not go near the water unless the instructor held his hand. The second looked eager, but he was obviously a rock – as soon as he let go of the side, he sunk to the bottom, so the instructor had to stay close to him so he wouldn’t drown.’

‘The third,’ the shy mayor took a deep breath and shook his head from side to side as he pictured the scene in his mind. ‘The third boy actually looked like he was probably a pretty decent swimmer, but it was a little difficult to tell. He was tall and skinny, and he would just scurry around the deck and push other kids into the pool. Either that, or else he would get into the water and, when the instructor wasn’t looking, he would hold someone’s head under until they panicked and nearly drowned. That kid was everywhere – he never stopped! I got tired just watching him!’

‘At the other end of the pool were two more boys. I found out later that they had reached Level Seven even though they were only fourteen. They were doing fancy flips and dives into the deep water. Sometimes they would splash one of the other kids, so the instructor would yell at them from the shallow end. The boys would go sit on the side for a while and then start goofing off again. They did not seem like trouble makers – they were obviously bored. Sometimes, however, they would tease the weaker swimmers. It was sad and frustrating at the same time.’

‘And in the middle,’ the shy mayor continued, ‘was my daughter and about ten other kids. Sometimes they tried to practice on their own, and the instructor helped them with the backstroke when she could – but a scream from the shallow end quickly sent her scrambling back to help one of the two boys...or the victim of the third.’

‘After class, I went to talk to the instructor. Probably bad timing on my part. After an hour of helping the scared boy and the rock, restraining the tyrant, and yelling at the Level Sevens, she was dead tired. She said that to keep the two Level Seven boys from getting bored, she used to enlist their help with the kids who were struggling so she could focus on the average kids. Having the advanced swimmers help the weaker swimmers seemed to make the classes run more smoothly, but soon, both sets of parents complained: the parents of the Level Seven kids said they did not pay for lessons so their kids could be instructors, and the parents of the ones who were struggling complained because they did not pay for their kids to be babysat by other children.’

‘The instructor was tired and frustrated, and I knew she was doing her best – better than I would have done if I were in her position - but I still wanted my daughter to learn how to swim better - and to pass the class. So I talked to the administrator – the same lady I talked to at registration.’

‘How did that go?’ one of the mayors asked.

The shy mayor fluttered his hand as if to say, ‘so-so’ and then said, ‘I met with her in her office downtown. She said that it was good for strong swimmers to help weaker ones – this is how it will be at a public pool or lake – they have to get used to being around swimmers of every ability. Plus, the ones who are already at Level Seven, or even Level Five, are advanced for their age, so they can just take care of themselves in the pool and they have many years ahead of them to improve their swimming. She then reminded me that the girl from our region who won bronze at the last Olympics had, as a child, spent two years in this very program.’

‘Yes I know she did,’ I acknowledged, how could a person not know? Pictures of the swimmer and her bronze medal were plastered everywhere around the pool and in the administrator’s office, ‘but the instructor in my daughter’s class spends all her time with only three students, and there are fifteen or so in the class.’

‘What did she say to that?’ one mayor asked.

The shy mayor answered, ‘She asked me, ‘If one of those struggling kids was your child, wouldn’t you want the instructor right beside her to keep her from drowning, or would you prefer the instructor be at the far end of the pool helping kids who are perfectly able to take care of themselves?’’

‘I couldn’t argue. But I asked, ‘Is that the purpose of swimming lessons for fourteen year olds – *we will keep them from drowning?*’ I did not wait for a response, but as I turned and walked out of her office, I noticed a sign that read: *Our mission: To help ALL swimmers reach their full potential.* Maybe I shouldn’t have, but I turned back around and confronted the administrator, ‘Do you think my daughter is reaching her full potential in swimming?’

‘Good question!’ One of the mayors exclaimed, ‘what did she say to that?’

‘She answered my question with a question,’ the shy mayor responded. ‘She asked if I was a trained swimming instructor. When I said that I was a banker and my only experience with swimming lessons was when I took them as a child, she said that I couldn’t really understand all the issues involved. After that, it was clear the meeting was over. As she stood up and walked me to the door of her office, she said that she looked forward to discussing my concerns in more detail...when I was a licensed swim instructor. And, with that, she closed her office door behind me and I stood outside, alone.’

‘What happened next?’ one mayor asked in disbelief.

‘A few days later my daughter said that one of the Level Seven boys had been kicked out of the class because he threw a pool noodle at the instructor. Not wanting to be by himself, the other Level Seven boy just quit. Also, to help the instructor, the administrator hired two adult assistants to stay near the scared kid and the rock. They were not instructors, so the two boys never learned how to swim...but then again, they didn’t drown either.’

‘Meanwhile, the instructor split her time between the ten kids that were left and the tyrant. In the end, they were told that next year all thirteen students would move on to the fifteen year old class...so I guess they all passed. I’m not sure how though, they never did get to the breast stroke...’ his voice trailed off and he sat back down.

‘What has happened since?’ another mayor wanted to know.

The shy mayor answered, but did not get up. ‘The following year, swim classes were closed to spectators. From what I can gather, they still have one or two helpers for the weakest swimmers and the new instructor spends most of his time with the tyrant.’

‘As for my daughter,’ he went on, ‘the next two years we made her go back to the fifteen and sixteen year old classes. She passed both, whatever that means – she doesn’t seem to be much better of a swimmer than what she was three years ago. She seems to have lost interest in swimming but doesn’t really kick up a fuss about going – all her friends are there, anyway...’

The old mayor ran his hand down his beard and said, 'So, the promise of an *inclusive* program is that same-aged students will be grouped together, *but* each student will be instructed according to their level of ability. Is that right?'

'Yes, that is how I understand it is supposed to be,' the shy mayor answered.

Another mayor interjected. 'But the staffing required for that – you heard what happened to the poor swimming instructor – she was burnt out and had to be replaced the next year.'

The old mayor turned to the shy mayor and said, 'You mentioned your daughter is about the same level of swimmer as she was at fourteen, right?'

'Yes,' the shy mayor responded, 'I'm mean, pretty much – I must admit, as long as she is passing, I don't really check up on what she is doing.'

'So maybe,' the old mayor said, 'the inclusive swim program is working perfectly – your daughter has reached her potential. That's possible, isn't it?'

'I suppose it is possible,' the shy mayor conceded, although not entirely convinced it was true.

The old mayor collected his thoughts, while the rest of the mayors sat quietly, considering all they had heard. The old mayor slowly began to speak,

'We save face by keeping our new purpose: to enable ALL foals to reach their full potential,' he thought out loud. 'This is a better service. Rather than doing this by changing to more trainers and all the other stuff written there...' he said as he gestured to the paper lying on the floor, '...we will provide *differentiated* instruction in *inclusive* classrooms. This allows us to keep the existing structure – and staffing levels – at all the Ranches...so we can lower taxes...'

'Plus,' he went on, 'if it works like the swimming lessons, there will be similar outcomes between foals – minimal achievement gaps...'

'But the administrator for the swimming lessons did have to hire a few helpers,' one mayor added, 'we will at least need to do that to help the trainers with the weakest foals, don't we?'

'We will check into that, but I think we are ready to go for the fall,' the old mayor began to conclude the meeting and the mayors all stood up, getting ready to leave.

'One more thing before you go,' the old mayor said loudly, 'We already have the signs above all of the Ranch entrances that say *To enable All foals to reach their full potential* – and that is fine – that is what owners want to see; but the posters in the office of each head trainer

must be removed. Each of you must instruct your head trainers on how to communicate with the owners as well as the trainers at the Ranches...Every chance they have, they are to push the idea of *inclusive* classrooms and *differentiated* instruction. Understood?’

‘Understood!’ the mayors replied as they left the room.

The old mayor said goodnight to each mayor as they filed passed him and out the door. When the last mayor left, the old man slowly walked to the chalk board and picked up the eraser brush. He slowly began erasing the right side of the board; going over it until there was no trace of what had been written. He then moved to the left side of the board. As he raised the brush to the top of the board he stopped – underneath the new purpose, he could still clearly read most of the old purpose: *To train...plow horses*, ‘just like the signs out front,’ he thought.

The old man sighed and pressed the brush to the chalk board. It took several minutes to completely erase everything that had been written. He walked back to the right side of the board and removed the top of the poster that was still taped up. He then bent down and picked up the bottom of the poster from the floor. Silently, he walked out of the room, stopping briefly to take one last look around. He shut off the lights and closed the door. After leaving the building, he slowly walked down the wooden sidewalk. Next door, a neighboring owner was burning his garbage in an open barrel. Without stopping or looking back, the old man dropped the poster into the fire and went home.”

Grandad stopped and closed his eyes, “Tune in next week,’ he smiled and said, ‘I will finally get to your dad and his days at Ranch.’

He seemed to fall asleep but then suddenly opened his eyes and blurted, ‘Oh! I also promised to tell you about the Kaimanawa horses and the Morab horses...’

And then he fell asleep.

Chapter 10: The Kaimanawas and Morabs

In the week that followed, I thought more about Grandad and his health than I did his stories about the PTG and the Ranch. When I arrived at his owner's farm, I was elated to see him out by the water trough. Once my owner's daughter removed my saddle and bridle, and finished brushing me, I cantered out to see him.

"Grandad!" I shouted as I got near.

He turned toward me and he rubbed his muzzle up against mine. His short greyish-white hair scratched my nose.

"Surprised to see me up and about?" he asked.

"Naw," I lied. "Like Mom says, you're too ornery to die."

He laughed and we each took a drink of water before returning to our shaded spot. The mid-summer sun had grown much hotter in recent weeks, but the poplar tree above us had really filled in nicely, so we were quite comfortable in its shade.

"So, your dad started Ranch that fall." Once again, Grandad picked up right where he had left off. "His owner – you remember, the lawyer – led him under the Ranch sign that boldly declared their purpose: *To enable ALL foals to reach their full potential.*

As they entered the main stable, the smell of paint was thick in the air, and your dad felt sick to his stomach. Seeing your dad snorting and shaking his head trying to escape the fumes, the lawyer asked, 'what's the matter, boy?' and led him to the indoor water trough. The water seemed to help. Once your dad stopped writhing, the lawyer took him to the portion of the stable designated for level one foals. Ten colts and seven fillies were already crammed into the small area.

'Are all these foals going to be in level 1?' the lawyer asked the trainer.

The frazzled trainer looked around and answered, 'These eighteen plus we are expecting six more.' The trainer took a deep breath as and braced himself like a soldier before an onslaught. 'But,' he continued, 'only about half will be here at any given time, the rest will be feeding or in the pasture, resting.'

'That is still a dozen foals in here at once,' the lawyer said. 'This room looks like it was built for about five foals.'

'We'll make it work,' the trainer said, trying to manufacture optimism, but the doubt in his eyes was unmistakable.

‘Anyway,’ the lawyer went on, ‘I guess that is your problem, not mine.’ The lawyer smiled sympathetically at the trainer. Then the lawyer, unaware of the PTG meetings that had taken place since his meeting with the head trainer, said, ‘I imagine the head trainer told you already, but I would like my colt here trained as a rider-less messenger. Are you the one with the specialized training, or is there another trainer I should talk to?’ The lawyer looked around but there was not another trainer in sight.

The trainer looked confused and said, ‘Sorry, the head trainer did not mention anything specifically about your colt. But I will be his trainer this year. I will train all the yearlings here in level 1.’

‘You mean they are going to be grouped by age?’ the lawyer asked, ‘I was told they will be grouped by their training area and achievement level.’

‘Well, not exactly,’ the trainer replied. ‘They will be grouped by age but we have instituted a new program so every foal will receive appropriate training for his or her level of achievement. We are now an *inclusive* Ranch and each level is an *inclusive* group,’ the trainer said proudly.

‘Inclusive Ranch? Inclusive group? What does that mean?’ the lawyer asked.

‘Our goal is to enable ALL foals to reach their potential within inclusive groups – groups that include all foals of the same age, regardless of their relative disability.’

‘What about relative abilities?’ the lawyer asked, ‘My colt here is a natural messenger. As it is right now, he is as good or better as most five or six year old foals. With the right training, I know he could be the best rider-less messenger horse in this region. Will he get this training in a level with twenty-four yearlings and only one trainer?’

‘Well,’ the trainer answered confidently, ‘we did not specifically talk about foals who have above average abilities, but we have a philosophy of *differentiated* instruction – I will provide the training appropriate to each foals needs – whether they are low ability or high ability foals.’

‘And you have the training to do this?’ the lawyer inquired.

‘You bet! Just last week I took a three day course in how to adjust my training for foals who are having trouble pulling the designated weight,’ the trainer answered.

‘So, you learned how to help foals who are struggling – and, more specifically, only foals who are struggling to pull their weight?’

‘That’s all we talked about for three whole days,’ the trainer beamed.

‘What equipment do you have?’ the lawyer looked around, ‘All I see is the same plow machines that this colt’s sire used.’

‘Could be,’ the trainer said, ‘but you’ll notice they all have a nice fresh coat of paint on them – I bet they look a lot better than when this guy’s sire used them,’ the trainer said as he patted your dad on the muzzle.

‘How are plow machines going to help my colt reach his potential as a messenger horse?’ the lawyer demanded.

‘Messenger horses have to have strong legs to run, don’t they?’ the trainer responded.

‘What about the food? I noticed all the foals are feeding out of the same trough – foals who are bulking up to become plow horses need a different feed than a messenger horse would, isn’t that right?’ the lawyer pressed.

Un-phased, the trainer replied, ‘Yes, that is correct. But when a rider-less messenger horse is out on an assignment, will you always be able to control what he gets fed on some farm twenty miles from here?’

The trainer had a point, but the lawyer was still not satisfied.

The trainer looked at your dad’s owner and said, ‘Sir, I know this colt is valuable to you. We will enable him to reach his full potential within our inclusive classroom. I will differentiate my instruction to suit his needs. You have to trust me. Look around you,’ the trainer said as he motioned toward all the other foals and their owners. ‘Each one of these foals is as valuable to their owner as yours is to you – and each owner has chosen to send their foal here – it is the right thing to do.’

The lawyer remembered what his wife had said, about not being one of those over-protective owners who can’t trust someone else to train their foal. He turned and rubbed your dad’s neck and said, ‘Have a great day, I’ll see you in six hours.’ And with that, the lawyer walked out of the stable just as the clouds burst open and the rain began to come down in sheets. Your dad’s owner flipped up the collar of his coat, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and hurried back to his office.”

“What happened to Dad?” I asked.

“For the first couple of weeks he loved it,” Grandad said. “From day one he could nearly pull the required weight for level 1. And, once he got used to how the plow machine worked, he could easily pull all ten bales on the level 1 plow machine.”

“So, he was strong, eh?” I asked.

“Oh, he was strong,” Grandad smiled at me, “just like you are! I remember one day when I was taking my owner through town and we passed the Ranch and I saw your dad – he was your age, maybe a few months older – and he had such a bright white coat and mane, and when he pulled the plow machine the muscles in his legs and back would bulge,” Grandad paused as he re-lived the scene, “he made it look so effortless.”

“So he was successful at Ranch,” I said. “His owners’ fears were wrong.”

Grandad shook his head, “No. He was not successful,” he said slowly.

“As the weeks went on,” Grandad continued, “the trainer started giving your dad more and more time in the pasture and at the feeding trough. For a while, your dad liked this – he was still a yearling and he thought it was great having more time to relax, and eat, and just hang out with the other yearlings.”

“Because he spent so much time outside, the older foals started noticing him. I remember one time when four foals from level four – three colts and a filly – came and started to tease him about how he thought he was so strong and better than everyone else. They circled around him. They were snorting and challenged him to a fight. When your dad started walking away, the other horses began flinging dirt on him with their hooves.”

“Like those bullies did to you when you went to Ranch, eh Grandad?” I commented.

“Kind of,” he replied, “but your dad was not like me. He turned around and looked the ringleader right in the eyes. They both began snorting and shrieking and they butted heads. Before you knew it, horses were biting and kicking each other, hooves were flying, and the squeals and screams from the combatants brought the trainers running.”

“How did Dad do?” I asked excitedly.

“He was a little bruised up, but he held his own – against four foals, all older than him! He established himself pretty high on the pecking order that day.”

“All right, Dad!” I exclaimed, but I was confused, “Grandad, that is not the horse I remember. I mean, he died when I was pretty young and I remember him being pretty strong,

but he was fairly, um, well, he was quite overweight. And...well, he just never seemed to have that fight in him like you describe.”

“By the time you came, that is about right,” Grandad agreed. “Ya see, after the fight, the trainers gave him – gave all five of the foals – a pretty good beating. And the head trainer called your dad’s owner in and told him what had happened.”

“The lawyer was shocked. ‘He has always had an even temperament – never aggressive like this,’ he said.

‘How much time a day is my colt spending in the pasture these days?’ the lawyer asked.

‘Our policy is that each foal spends 2 hours in each station: work, feeding, rest,’ the head trainer replied.

‘I know that is the policy,’ the lawyer said, ‘but that is not what I asked. How long is *my* colt spending in the pasture every day?’

‘I assume two hours,’ replied the head trainer, ‘but, I must admit, with this high enrolment, I am so busy with meetings and paperwork, I don’t get down there very often to see for myself – I will call in the level 1 trainer.’

When the level 1 trainer arrived in the room, the head trainer asked him, ‘How long does this man’s colt spend in the pasture every day?’

Feeling the lawyers glare, the trainer quickly replied, ‘Our policy is two hours of pasture time.’

‘And, is that how long this colt has been spending in the pasture every day?’ the head trainer leaned forward and asked.

The trainer fidgeted in his chair, ‘Oh, I don’t know maybe a bit over two hours.’

‘How much is *a bit*?’ the head trainer asked.

The trainer hesitated, ‘Um, a bit. I don’t know, a while.’

The lawyer, frustrated with the lack of information jumped in.

‘Today, when the fight broke out at the end of the day, how long had my colt been in the pasture?’ the lawyer demanded to know.

‘All day. Okay? I was busy with the other foals – I have nearly thirty now – I just let him go outside. He can pull the full level 1 weight anyway. So he spends the day either in the pasture or at the feeding trough,’ the frustrated trainer admitted.

Your dad’s owner was momentarily speechless.

Finally, he said, ‘You are telling me that you put my colt out in the pasture all day and when he gets into trouble – likely out of neglect and boredom – you beat him and then call me in?’

The lawyer stared at the head trainer.

The head trainer responded, ‘This is not our policy...’

The lawyer stood up and loudly said, ‘No, your policy is right there...’ he pointed out the window to the entrance to the Ranch: ‘...*To enable ALL foals to reach their full potential.* Is six hours of neglect enabling *my* foal to reach his full potential?’ The lawyer was fuming.

‘Yes.’ The head trainer replied simply.

The lawyer could not believe what he heard. He looked at the head trainer and then shifted his stare to the level 1 trainer and gestured to him as if to say, ‘Did you hear that?’ The trainer just dropped his eyes and said nothing. The lawyer looked back at the head trainer and forced himself to use a calm voice.

‘Did you say *yes*?’ the lawyer asked. ‘Could you please tell me how six hours in the pasture is enabling my colt to reach his full potential?’

The head trainer nodded. ‘Well, horses are often left alone with other horses,’ he said. ‘Learning to get along with each other is part of maturity – part of reaching their potential. This extended unsupervised time is actually vital to their development. It is necessary.’

‘So, if it is such vital training, and necessary for enabling a foal to reach his potential, I trust all foals are left outside for six hours a day...’ the lawyer looked at the trainer for a response.

The trainer looked down as he answered, ‘Most foals can’t afford the time to...learn that skill...’ he glanced at the head trainer, ‘...they need more time on the plow machine.’

‘So you see,’ the head trainer responded, ‘because your colt is beyond his peers in strength, he gets to learn the additional skill of learning to behave himself when left unsupervised. Thus, we are enabling your colt to reach his full potential, just as we promised we would do. And, in case you didn’t know, the foals in our Ranch, on average, test stronger than half the other Ranches in our region.’

The room went quiet as the lawyer was at a loss for words. After a few moments, the head trainer said to your dad’s owner, ‘Look, you are a lawyer not a trainer; I appreciate your concerns, but with all due respect, this is not your area of expertise. Please, you go and do your

job – the job *you* 've been trained to do; and let us do our job, the job *we* 've been trained to do. Remember, we have been training foals for generations at this Ranch, I think we have learned a thing or two about it along the way.'

'But,' he said to the trainer, 'if he had access to the level 2 or 3 plow machines instead of...' the lawyer realized it was pointless to argue, this problem went higher than the trainer, or even the head trainer, he would have to take this up with the PTG – and maybe he would have to do the job he was trained to do."

Grandad stopped talking. I waited quietly; I had learned a little patience in the past few weeks. But not too much...

"What is it?" I blurted.

"I'm not sure where to go next," he replied. "We probably don't have time to for me to tell you how things went with the lawyer and the PTG." He paused again.

Not wanting him to stop for the day, I urged him to continue, "Tell me about the Kaimanawa horses and the Morab horses." I was proud that I had remembered how to pronounce their name, ky-man-ah-wah.

"Okay, now might be as good of time as any. You'll have to remind me where we were – your dad's owner was about to go to the PTG."

"I'll remind you," I said, knowing full-well he would remember.

"The Kaimanawa horses..." Grandad began, as he shook his head sadly. "As I understand it, here is what happened: when my pappy and his owners came to this area, there was a whole wave of owners who had also come from the East, just like they did. All the horses that came from the East, and their descendants – like you – were either all white, or mostly white."

"I remember you said that your mom was whiter than any of them!" I commented. It seemed like so long ago when he had told me that.

"Yes she was," Grandad nodded. "Some say there is no such thing as a truly white horse, but she was as close as they come. But what the settlers did not know at the time was that there were already large herds of Kaimanawa horses roaming this country."

"What do you mean *roaming*?" I asked. "Didn't the Kaimanawa horses have owners?"

Yes, they had owners. But their owners were nomads, not farmers. They hunted and fished and moved around the region following their migrating game. They owned the

Kaimanawa horses, but they did not keep them in pastures like our owners – they let them roam free.”

“That is hard for me to imagine,” I said. “No fences, no barn, no stall – no trough!”

“Yes,” Grandad agreed, “they had a different way of life, that’s for sure.”

He continued, “When the settlers first came to this area, the Kaimanawa horses and their owners were further north, and by the time they returned, the Ranch had already been built – and it was built right on the field where the Kaimanawa horses had always grazed when they were in this area.”

“What did the owners of the Kaimanawa horses do?” I asked.

“Well, they talked things over with the owners from the East and, to make a long story short, they came to an agreement,” Grandad said.

“What was the agreement? I asked impatiently – he was really making me pull this out of him...and making a long story short had never been his practice!

Grandad replied, “They agreed that the owners could keep the foal training Ranch where it was. In return, the owners of the Kaimanawa horses could send their foals to the Ranch for training without paying taxes – the use of the land was to be considered their payment.”

“That seems reasonable,” I commented, “but I can tell from your voice that things did not work out, did they?”

“No, they did not,” Grandad said. “You see, the Kaimanawa horses were accustomed to roaming the wild in herds. Unlike the white horses, they could gallop for miles at a time without taking a rest or needing water. Also, they were used to eating leaves and wild berries. And since they were endurance horses, they were not as strong as the white horses who had been bred to be plow horses – when the owners of the Kaimanawa horses needed strength, say, to drag a large animal they had hunted from deep in the bush to their camp, the owners would just use several Kaimanawa horses and they would work together.”

Grandad continued, “So, you can probably already see the problem...”

“I think so,” I interrupted. “The Ranches were designed to train foals to be plow horses; and even though the Kaimanawa horses were great at endurance and living off the land, they were not very good at pulling a plow machine.”

“You got it,” Grandad said – obviously impressed, “but it was even worse. First, the Kaimanawa horses were used to working together, but when they tried to help each other pull the

plow machines they were punished. Second, the hay that was provided to the Ranches made many of the Kaimanawa horses sick and they became even weaker. And third, the owners of the Kaimanawa horses were not used to staying in one place – or sending their foals to Ranch – so many of the Kaimanawa foals missed training and fell behind even further.”

“Oh boy, you were right – that did not go well. What happened next?” I asked. “Everyone realized that this was not working,” Grandad answered. “Some of the owners from the East just said that the Kaimanawa horses should be removed from the Ranches and things should go back as they had been before the Kaimanawa horses and their owners had returned. When this was suggested to the owners of the Kaimanawa horses, they were not satisfied because...”

“Because Great-Grandad’s owners had agreed to train their foals in exchange for the use of the land the Ranch was built on,” I interjected.

Grandad smiled at me and nodded, “Very good – smart like your dad.”

I must admit, I was quite proud of myself.

“So, smart guy,” Grandad teased, “what did the PTG do?”

I thought for a moment, “Well, I guess the PTG would have to let the Kaimanawa horses stay – they had a deal.”

“Half points,” Grandad said. “The PTG had to let the Kaimanawa foals stay, but the owners of the Kaimanawa horses said the initial agreement was for the PTG to train the Kaimanawa foals. Since the owners of the Kaimanawa horses were nomadic, they wanted the foals trained as they traveled – and they wanted them trained in the ways they were to be used: endurance, team work, and living in the wild.”

“So, do you know what the PTG did?” Grandad asked me.

I shook my head. “I have no idea,” I admitted.

“They built small Ranches along the route the nomads took. Each of these Ranches was furnished with used plow machines that the town Ranches no longer used. Plus, the PTG sent allotments of hay to each Ranch for feed.”

“Oh, and for trainers,” Grandad added, “for trainers the PTG sent out new graduates from the training school in hopes that they would hone their skills and gain experience for when they returned to the growing number of town Ranches.”

“Grandad?” I asked. “It sounds like all the PTG did was make smaller – and more poorly equipped – plow horse training Ranches. And why did they send hay that would just make the Kaimanawa foals sick?”

“I think I may have skipped over a few things,” Grandad replied. “The owners of the Kaimanawa foals were not happy when their foals went to the town Ranch because most of them did poorly. However, some of them did really well in the town Ranch – and became strong plow horses – unfortunately, that was a skill that was totally useless to the nomadic owners. Worse than useless, a strong plow horse is usually a poor endurance horse. So that was why they wanted their foals trained for endurance, teamwork, and living off the land.”

He continued, “And because the PTG had agreed to train the Kaimanawa foals, the nomadic owners insisted that the PTG live up to their end of the bargain and provide the training...”

“But what did the PTG know about training foals for endurance, teamwork, and living off the land? Their Ranches were designed to train foals for strength, individual ability, and...eating out of a trough,” I said.

“Nothing,” Grandad answered plainly. “All the PTG knew how to do was to train plow horses – so that is what they did...And the more the Kaimanawa foals became like plow horses (or failed in the attempt), the angrier the nomadic owners became, and the more they insisted on traditional training for their Kaimanawa foals...Who did they turn to for the training? The ones who had promised to provide training – the PTG. The more the owners of the Kaimanawa foals insisted that the PTG provide training, the more the PTG tried to train Kaimanawa foals to be plow horses – the only type of training the PTG knew how to provide. It was a vicious cycle.”

“How was all this resolved?” I asked.

“I’ll let you know...once it *is* resolved,” Grandad answered.

“Hey Grandad?” I said after a moment of thinking. “I have a question.”

“What’s that?” he asked, looking up at me from his nest of straw.

“This was all still going on when Dad went to Ranch, right?” I inquired.

“When he went to Ranch, even when I went to Ranch, and it looks like it will still be that way when you go to Ranch in a few weeks,” Grandad said.

“Well, when Dad went,” I continued, “they said they were going to enable ALL foals to reach their potential in *inclusive* levels, using *differentiated* instruction. Did I get that all right?”

“You got it,” Grandad said. “Nice to see you have been paying attention!”

“If that is the case, the Kaimanawa foals should have been able to attend the town Ranch in a level with foals their own age – inclusive, right? And the trainers should have adjusted their methods – and the food – to train them to for endurance – this would be differentiation. And, in doing so, the Kaimanawa foals may have had a chance to reach their potential as valuable horses for nomadic owners. This should have worked,” I concluded, somewhat confused.

“In theory, it should have – if we assume that potential can be measured, and forget that in reaching their potential as roaming nomads, the Kaimanawa foals are foregoing their potential as plow horses. In this case, however, there is another factor: it took generations for the nomads to learn how to properly train the Kaimanawa horses. The skills the nomadic owners had could not be learned by PTG trainers in a three month training program.”

“Why don’t some of the nomadic owners become trainers, then?” I asked.

“Two reasons, I suppose,” Grandad answered. “One, because they are nomads, not trainers who live in one town for their whole life. Second, and more importantly, because before they are allowed to work at a Ranch, they have to take the PTG training program – which teaches trainers how to train plow horses, not roaming horses. So by the time they graduate, they are just like every other trainer.”

“Hmmm.” I pondered all Grandad was saying. “I have a feeling we’re not going to figure this out today. Can you tell me about the Morab horses?”

“Ah, yes,” Grandad said, “another interesting story.”

“Another *sad* story?” I asked.

Grandad thought for a few seconds before answering, “I don’t know how to answer that,” he finally answered. “You’ll have to judge for yourself.”

Intrigued by his ambiguity, I leaned forward to listen.

Grandad began, “In the time between the year I left the Ranch and the time your dad entered, there began an influx of Morab horses from a few far away regions. I don’t know much about their background, but most of their owners lived in the towns and worked in the shops and stores – they were not farmers.”

“Like the Kaimanawa horses – and us, I suppose – the historical use of Morab horses had given them unique strengths. Because of the vocations of their owners, these were generally very strong horses as they had been used to operate machines that did things like pressing wheat

into flour, lifting heavy supplies to a shelf, and pumping water out of wells. Because of the nature of their labour, Morab horses were usually very muscular and it was expected that they would do very well at Ranch.”

“Did they?” I asked.

“At first,” Grandad answered, “the white foals did not really accept them and they mainly kept to themselves. However, by the time your dad went to Ranch, nearly a third of the foals in his level were Morab, so I guess they had no choice but to get along.”

“Since they were so strong, they must have done great at Ranch!” I speculated.

“Actually not,” Grandad answered. “At first, their poor performance was blamed on culture shock – they were too nervous to perform well on the plow machine. In spite of their obvious strength, they were failing.”

“What happened?” I wondered.

Grandad replied, “Around the time your dad went to Ranch, the trainers realized what it was: the Morab foals had incredible vertical strength for lifting straight up, but their horizontal strength – their pulling strength - was average or below, compared to a white foal of the same age.”

“So, with differentiated instruction,” I surmised, “to enable ALL the Morab foals to reach their potential in their owners’ shops, the trainers adjusted the plow machines for lifting rather than pulling, right?”

Grandad shook his head. “No, instead the Morab foals were put with younger white foals so they could start learning how to pull a plow machine using less weight. Instead of taking five years to reach the level 5 weight requirements, most of the Morab foals took seven years.”

“Didn’t their owners complain?” I asked.

“Being new to the region, they did not really know what was happening. Besides, they were so busy in their shops; I don’t think they even noticed. But when things happened with your dad, and his owner, *everyone* knew what was happening at the Ranch.”

I wasn’t sure if it was intentional or not, but Grandad had brought the story right back to where he had left off. He winked at me and continued. “So your dad’s owner – the lawyer – went to speak to the president of the PTG. The president was the mayor from the town with one of the four original Ranches.”

“Which one?” I asked.

“It was actually the first one – the one that was successful in the first year...”

“The one with money,” I said.

“That’s the one,” Grandad said as he pointed his hoof at me. “I never heard exactly what was said in that exchange, but the lawyer had hardly left the building when the president picked up the phone arranging for an emergency meeting of the PTG!”

I heard some noise around the corner of the shed...it was my owner’s daughter coming to get me. I stood up, and when she came to put my bridle on, I threw my head back in protest. I looked over at Grandad as if he could rescue me. He just lay on his straw and smiled at me. Then he motioned with his nose toward the gate. I got the message. I co-operated as the girl led me away; as I walked by Grandad, he swatted me in the fetlock with his tail.

As I carried my owner’s daughter home, I noticed the air had begun to cool. Even though I thought we had just arrived at Grandad’s owner’s farm, the position of the sun – and my growling stomach – told me it was already supper-time.

I felt a gentle kick in my ribs and began to trot. When we passed through town, I looked at the Ranch grounds. In addition to the workers who were painting the stable, there seemed to be much more work going on now. I thought about what it was like when this was just an empty field where roaming Kaimanawa horses grazed. And then I thought about my dad...a tough foal? I realized I never knew him – Dad: strong? Smart? And tough? I shook my head in disbelief. For some reason, he had changed. I remembered how Grandad said that the trainers beat Dad because he got in a fight with the bullies. I wondered what the lawyer said to the president – oh how I would have loved to hear that.

And, I wondered, what happened at the emergency PTG meeting?

Now, years later, I collect my thoughts on the straw in my stall. That meeting, I realize now, was a turning point in our lives. I believe it is why Dad died young; and I believe it is why I am tired and grey and though I am still a stallion, most owners mistake me for a gelding twice my age. On the other hand, that meeting began the process that led to my young filly’s excitement today. I guess someone had to pay the price for her and her offspring. But back then...back then I did not know all the things I did not know.

So I trotted home – badly in need of some time at the feeding trough.

Chapter 11: Reflections on Death

Because Grandad had looked so good the previous week, the next time I came to visit, I was surprised to find him back in his stall, sleeping at mid-day. Once again, his breathing was raspy and his eyes were half open and glazed. His legs were awkwardly bent underneath him as if he had just collapsed on them, and his tail was pinned underneath his flank. Flies were crawling all over his legs and side and face, but he didn't even flinch. I was a little ashamed of myself for thinking it, but he looked so unnatural, I was afraid to go near him.

Motivated more by shame than by compassion, I lay down next him. With my tail I swatted flies from his body, and with my head I gently rubbed his neck and face. I did not try to wake him up. Several hours later, when my owner's daughter came to get me, I left without him knowing I had even been there.

On this trip home, my owner's daughter did not seem to be in a hurry, and I was grateful for the slow walk. I thought about my Grandad and the reality that soon he would be gone. Even as a yearling, I knew that death was natural. As strong and healthy and productive as Grandad once was...he had plowed many fields and sired many healthy and strong foals...his purpose on the farm had been served.

I wondered if he would die peacefully on his own or if his owners would acknowledge his fate and help him. Grandad had been a great horse for them for many years; I didn't think they would let him suffer. My thoughts went to horror stories I had heard about horses whose end had come: horses that were in severe pain, and in their agony they convulsed and writhed and could not be comforted. Young foals that saw this happen often wouldn't eat or sleep for days. I even heard that if cows saw this kind of death, their milk would be sour for a week.

I didn't know if any of this was true, but I still got sick to my stomach thinking about the suffering that is caused by prolonging the inevitable. So I tried not to think about it.

Chapter 12: Laws That Discriminate and a Surprising Visitor

When my owner's daughter came to get me the following week, I was reluctant to go.

"C'mon," she said, "We only have a few more times we can go before I start school and you start Ranch."

She saddled and bridled me and I trotted all the way to Grandad's owner's farm. It was cloudy out, but not much rain. The cooler weather was a reprieve from the scorching temperatures we had been having.

I went to Grandad's stall and began to panic when I found it empty. I galloped through the stable, out to the pasture. I whinnied loudly in every direction but heard no reply. He wasn't at the feeding trough or the water trough. "I never even got to say goodbye!" I thought to myself.

I think I had given up hope when, out of habit, I guess, I walked toward the big poplar tree. As I rounded the old shed, there was Grandad, lying in his usual spot.

"Grandad!" I shouted, and galloped toward him, rubbing my muzzle into his neck. He did not get up, "Whoa there!" he said. "You seem surprised to see me."

"I just thought..." I slowly began, but then wanted to lighten the mood, "I just thought that maybe you weren't as ornery as Mom says!"

I forced an awkward smile, but his sincere belly laugh got me giggling, and then laughing, too. Reality reared its ugly head quickly though, as, once again, Grandad started violently coughing; I thought he might die right there!

With some help from me, Grandad was able to sit himself up, and within a few minutes he stopped coughing, and finally he stopped sputtering and snorting. I asked if he wanted to go get some water but he said he was unable to stand.

"Why didn't you visit me last week?" he said as he settled back onto the straw.

"I did!" I exclaimed, more than a little offended. "But you were sleeping. I didn't want to wake you up!"

"I know, I know, settle down," he said. "When my owner was brushing me that evening he was asking how I enjoyed my visit with you."

"Grandad?" I said quietly.

He looked at me and nodded for me to continue.

“I have really loved spending this time with you and hearing about our family and our town and the Ranch and stuff. I am going to miss you when...when I start Ranch in a few weeks and can't come as often.”

The old horse's eyes grew watery but he did not speak. He just nodded.

When Grandad finally spoke, his voice cracked at first but then grew in strength and was soon back to normal. “At the emergency PTG meeting...”

“How does he do that?” I thought.

“...the president of the PTG said that the lawyer was going to sue the Ranch.

‘What for?’ a mayor asked.

‘He didn't say,’ replied the president. ‘But just so we could prepare, I asked our lawyer, Ed Wright, to join us.’ He motioned to the back of the room as a grey-haired man in his mid to late fifties stood up and nodded his head to the group.

‘What is our position?’ one of the mayors asked Mr. Wright.

Mr. Wright opened his briefcase and said, ‘It is good news and bad news.’

‘What's the good news?’ a mayor inquired.

‘As I understand it, the lawyer will likely sue because his colt was above average for his age, and therefore, did not receive appropriate training in an age-based group environment. I think we can beat him on this charge.’

‘He is just a hot-head!’ a mayor in the back shouted. ‘We shouldn't even listen to him. You know, he is not from around here, anyway.’

‘Maybe the PTG and the Ranches don't have to listen,’ Mr. Wright replied, ‘but the courts might.’

One of the mayors spoke up. ‘I really hate to say this, but I used to be a trainer at a Ranch, and up until last year I was a head trainer, and gifted foals often do not get training appropriate for their abilities or their achievement.’

Mr. Wright acknowledged the former trainer's statement with a nod, ‘However, that may not be an issue in court. There was a very similar case in the region just south of here, and the owner lost – and he lost big! I will speak further to that in a moment,’ he paused and then said, ‘so, the good news is that this owner likely cannot successfully sue us, the bad news is that nearly every other owner who has a foal at a Ranch could!’

The mayors from the PTG were thoroughly confused. Before they could ask, Mr. Wright explained.

‘You have to know the policies and the laws that are in place,’ he said. ‘First, let me read you a few excerpts from your own PTG guidelines – a binding legal document, I might add.’

Mr. Wright pulled a handful of booklets out of his briefcase and said, ‘As these are *your* guiding policies, I am sure you are all familiar with this booklet, but I brought one for each of you in case yours is worn out or you left it on your night table by your bed.’ The sarcasm in his voice was unmistakable, but none of the mayors protested as they handed around copies of the booklet; it was a reprimand, and they knew it.

‘Now, turn with me to page 142 and read along so you know I’m not making this up.’ Mr. Wright waited as the mayors found the page. Mr. Wright began to read, ‘*Every foal has the right to receive training appropriate to that foal’s level of achievement.*’

‘*Every foal...we are sunk,*’ the president said.

Ignoring him, Mr. Wright continued, ‘Now turn to page 178 which pertains only to foals that are *weaker* than normal.’ He began to read, ‘*The head trainer **shall** provide services consistent with that foal’s needs and abilities.*’

‘Doesn’t that seem rather redundant?’ one mayor asked as he flipped back to page 142. ‘If *every* foal has the right to appropriate training based on their level of achievement, why does it then repeat itself saying that head trainers have to provide weak foals with appropriate services – aren’t weak foals included in *every* foal?’

‘One might think so,’ Mr. Wright replied. ‘But, now turn to page 187 which pertains to gifted foals, such as our lawyer’s colt.’ When the pages stopped turning, Mr. Wright read, ‘*Where the ordinary programs of instruction of the Ranch are insufficient to meet the training needs of certain foals of superior natural ability or exceptional talent, the head trainer **may** make provision for any special programs that he considers feasible and appropriate.*’

The room was quiet as mayors read, and re-read, the three policies. The president was the next to speak. ‘I don’t really get this,’ he admitted. ‘Page 142 says Ranches have to give ALL foals training at their level of achievement; page 178 restates the same thing for weaker foals; and page 187 says we only have to give gifted foals an appropriate training if we want to – and can afford it. Do I have this right?’

‘You can read as well as I can,’ Mr. Wright said. ‘We will just focus our defense against this lawyer on page 187, and ignore what it says on page 142.’

‘We are in the clear, then!’ one mayor exclaimed.

‘No you are not!’ Mr. Wright snapped. ‘Not by a long shot. You may be able to prove that you do not have to provide gifted foals with an appropriate education, and *maybe* that you are giving average foals an appropriate education, but what about page 178? What are you doing for the weaker foals?’

‘Okay,’ the president said. ‘We will add a few helpers to assist the weak foals. Maybe we can combine two levels, and with the salary saved from letting one trainer go, we could hire three or four less expensive helpers.’

One mayor spoke up. ‘I’m not a lawyer, but if Ranches provide all foals with appropriate training *except* gifted foals, couldn’t the lawyer get us on discrimination?’

‘Excellent question. Would you believe good news/bad news?’ Mr. Wright asked.

Mr. Wright dug into his briefcase again. This time he pulled out a handful of pages stapled together. The document each mayor received was four pages long with a staple in the top left corner.

When all the mayors received the handout, Mr. Wright explained, ‘You are holding a copy of the federal law that prescribes the behaviour of all Public Training Ranches and dictates how you must act in your dealings with horses.’

‘I highly recommend you read it all,’ he continued, ‘but for now, just turn to section fifteen.’

The mayors all flipped over a page as Mr. Wright started reading, ‘*Every* foal is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination...’

The president interrupted him. ‘So we *would* be guilty of discrimination – if we provide appropriate training to one foal – we have to provide it to every foal.’ The president shook his head.

‘You didn’t let me finish,’ Mr. Wright said, and then continued, ‘...and, in particular, without discrimination based on breed, colour, sex, financial status of owner, or mental or physical disability.’

Again, the mayors stopped to consider what was said.”

“I can tell you Grandad!” I blurted out, “It is just like that sign in town: No motorized vehicles allowed...particularly those with more than four wheels. It doesn’t make any sense!”

“Well you figured it out quicker than most of the mayors did,” Grandad said, “Mr. Wright explained it to the mayors this way...

‘First of all, I have heard that some of the Ranches are favouring the white foals – you better get some of those helpers for the Kaimanawa and the Morab foals, too – not just for the white ones! And I know that the fillies sometimes got second class treatment; and some of the foals from poor owners were mistreated and quit – equal treatment from now on – for ALL foals!’ Mr. Wright stopped and smiled.

‘Well, almost all,’ he said slyly.

Each mayor looked at Mr. Wright, then back at the federal document they were holding, and then back up at Mr. Wright. The old mayor spoke for all of them.

‘Mr. Wright, I am afraid I don’t understand what you are saying. As I read this,’ the old mayor said as he held up the papers in his hand. ‘We must treat *every* foal equally, but you seem to be saying something else.’

Mr. Wright nodded, ‘Indeed I am. Look at *exactly* what it says.’ The eyes of all the mayors returned to section 15 as Mr. Wright continued, ‘It does not matter what colour a foal is: white, red, brown; you cannot discriminate, right?’

‘Right,’ replied the old mayor.

‘And you cannot discriminate against a foal on the basis of their sex: male or female, right?’ Mr. Wright asked.

‘Right,’ the old mayor replied again.

‘And you cannot discriminate against a foal because of the financial status of the owner, whether rich or poor, right?’ Mr. Wright asked again.

‘Yes, right.’ The old mayor still did not know what Mr. Wright was getting at.

‘Now look closely at the last one on the list.’ Mr. Wright was finally getting to his point. ‘You cannot discriminate against a foal based on its mental or physical *DIS*-ability.’

Mr. Wright let the words sink in for a moment before further explaining: ‘You see, every other characteristic mentioned was a complete category: breed, colour, sex, financial status; if the list was consistent, instead of mental or physical *dis*-ability, it would have read mental or

physical *capacity* or *strength* or *condition*...had it said any of these, we could not discriminate against those with exceptionally high abilities...but it does not say that, does it?”

I could not believe what I was hearing. “So, Grandad,” I said, “was Mr. Wright saying that every foal on the Ranch had to be treated equally *except* gifted foals – like Dad?”

“No,” Grandad said, “Mr. Wright did not say it - that is what the *law* said. In fact, that is what the law *still* says.”

“So what did Dad’s owner do?” I asked, “I mean, he was a lawyer, he must have known all this, right? But how do you fight something that is unfair when the law itself is unfair?”

“You have two choices,” Grandad answered. “You either fight to have the law changed – which takes a lot of time and money; or you try to find another law that *is* on your side.”

I gave the shed a little kick with my left hind hoof. “C’mon Grandad, you are killing me here, what did the lawyer do?”

“Okay, okay,” Grandad said. “Sorry, I’ll speed things up.”

“Thank-you!” I said half-jokingly and half showing my exasperation.

“It is better to skip over a lot of this anyway; they were painful years for your dad.”

Grandad’s voice suddenly grew serious as he remembered.

“The lawyer fought the law,” he continued, finally. “He went to the nation’s capital to try to get the law amended, but change does not come quickly. And change does not come without a price...” his voice trailed off. This time I did not object, but patiently waited.

Soon Grandad went on. “For your dad, life grew increasingly miserable at Ranch. The head trainers had made the changes recommended by the PTG so there were even fewer trainers; plus, all the new helpers were assigned to the weak foals, or the Morab or Kaimanawa foals that were having trouble adjusting to the Ranch – basically every foal – except the gifted ones – had access to either a trainer or a helper.”

“And as for your dad,” Grandad looked down as he spoke, “his torment went beyond neglect. Since it was his owner who instigated the changes that cost half the trainers their jobs, the remaining trainers despised your dad. They knew they could not physically harm him (the head trainers had made that clear) but they mocked him. Instead of calling him by name, they would refer to him as *Special*.”

Grandad's voice cracked, but he continued. "The other foals picked up on this new name, and, for the last four years of Ranch, your dad was only referred to as *Special*." He began to imitate some of the things that were said:

"“Hey *Special*, are you too special to use the same plow machines as us?”

‘Oh look, it’s *Special*, he’s too special to have extra pasture time – who complains about extra pasture time anyway? Oh, *Special* does.’

‘*Special* thinks he is too special to help with the weaker foals. He’s *Special*.’”

Grandad paused for a moment and then said, “It was not long before the fire that was in your dad’s eyes as a yearling was extinguished by the tormenting words of the trainers and the other foals at Ranch. By the time he left Ranch as a six year old, he was a shadow of what he once was...”

This explained so much for me. Now I understood why the strong, courageous yearling Grandad had described was not the sire I knew as a suckling.

“Over the course of those four years,” Grandad went on, “the lawyer had spent all that he had trying to amend the federal discrimination law. Due to his constant absence from town, as well as the fact that he was now hated in his community for all the upheaval and job loss he had caused, his law practice was all but dead. Much like his horse, most of the life and energy had been sapped from the lawyer.”

“‘It is hopeless,’ the lawyer said to his wife as they sat at their kitchen table. ‘We are broke, no one in this town hires me anymore, I am no closer to getting the law changed than I was four years ago, and our horse...when I think of the potential he had as a foal...what a waste. What was all of this for?’

As if on cue, there was a knock on the front door. The lawyer did not even look up as his wife left the room to see who had come. The lawyer heard a man’s muffled voice and then his wife say, ‘Oh, please come in, my husband will be happy to see you – he is in the kitchen.’

As the sound of approaching footsteps grew louder, the lawyer shook his head as he tried to imagine who in the world he could possibly be happy to see at that moment. His wife entered the kitchen followed by a man carrying a large rolled up piece of paper. The lawyer looked up and thought to himself, ‘We have been married seventeen years and she thinks I’d be happy to see *this* guy?’

‘What do *you* want?’ the lawyer asked – he did not get up.

Before the man could reply, the lawyer's wife answered, 'He is here to help.' She then turned to the man, 'Can I get you some coffee?'

'That would be great,' he answered her.

'Please sit down while I get it,' she said as she motioned to the kitchen table and walked toward the cupboard to get a cup.

The man sat down and looked at the lawyer. The lawyer did not look up. They sat in silence for a few moments until the lawyer's wife set a cup of coffee down in front of the man. She went back to the counter and returned with a cup for her husband and a cup for herself. She joined the two men at the table and took a sip of the hot coffee. She gave a slight nod toward the man for him to begin.

Immediately the man started to address the lawyer. 'Five and a half years ago you came into my office to discuss the possibility of your foal starting Ranch that fall...'

'Worst mistake I ever made,' the lawyer interrupted. 'You lied to me – told me all about helping ALL foals reach their potential...'

'...that is why I am here,' now the man interrupted. 'I remember that conversation and I have thought about it often as I have watched what you and your foal have gone through these past years.' The man paused briefly and then continued, 'You know I am not a head trainer anymore?'

'No, sorry, I guess I haven't kept tabs on your career moves...I've been kind of busy,' the lawyer said bitterly.

The lawyer's wife put her hand on the lawyer's hand to settle him down.

Ignoring the lawyer's tone, the man continued, 'Several years ago I ran for mayor in another town – and won.'

Now the lawyer looked up, 'That means that you...'

'...I am now a member of the PTG,' the man finished the lawyer's sentence.

The lawyer stared at the man, trying to figure out this new mayor's angle – why had he come? He did not have to wait long to find out.

The mayor spoke. 'I was a trainer, then a head trainer. I know what goes on in Ranches: I know about inclusive levels and differentiated instruction and then all the changes to avoid discrimination against those that are struggling. And I have seen what happens to gifted foals...like yours.' Their eyes briefly met.

‘And the truth is,’ the mayor continued, ‘it is not just gifted foals who are suffering. Even if we forget about our grand purpose of foals reaching their potential and only look at strength training – since it is the only thing we actually measure – the foals in our Ranches are getting progressively worse: The weak foals are getting weaker, the strong foals are getting weaker, and the average foals are simply maintaining – at best.’

The lawyer could not believe what he was hearing...more accurately, he could not believe whom he was hearing it from!

‘You need to do something,’ the mayor said directly to the lawyer.

‘I cannot change the discrimination law...we found that out the hard way,’ he said as he glanced at his wife. ‘And in the region south of us, when a lawyer of a gifted foal sued their Ranches for malpractice, the lawyer lost. Trust me; I have looked into the case.’

‘Why did he lose?’ the mayor asked.

‘The judge said that the purpose of Ranches was clearly stated: to have foals reach minimum strength levels; and since this lawyer’s foal had successfully achieved those levels – the Ranch could not be guilty of malpractice. So, I...’ the lawyer stopped suddenly.

‘I see it!’ he shouted as he jumped up from the table, causing all three coffee cups to spill.

‘See what?’ his wife shouted at him as she scrambled to the cupboard to get a towel to clean up the three puddles forming on the linoleum floor.

The lawyer looked at her and spoke slowly as he worked it out in his head. ‘Malpractice is failing to provide a reasonable standard of care. A reasonable standard depends on what the *purpose* of the care is – in the South it was minimum strength standards, that is why the suit failed. But here...here the purpose is that ALL foals reach their potential. If I can show that foals – actually, even one foal - did not reach his or her potential, the Ranches are guilty of malpractice or, maybe...breach of contract!’

Oblivious to the overturned cups and spilled coffee, the lawyer sat back down as he considered his strategy. The mayor stepped back from the table as the lawyer’s wife cleaned up the coffee. When the wife had finished cleaning the floor, she and the mayor sat back down at the table.

The lawyer’s wife was curious. ‘I remember after your meeting,’ she said gesturing to both men with her hand, ‘you said that the whole idea of potential was problematic. Beyond some of your other concerns like competing potentials, fixed potential, and fostering immoral

potentials, you said that potential could not be measured. If it can't be measured, how can you prove it wasn't reached?" she asked her husband.

'That is what I am trying to figure out,' the lawyer said. 'Maybe I can use those things to my advantage.'

'How would you do that?' his wife asked.

The lawyer looked up at her and said, 'Competing potentials is pretty easy: for example, by only training foals to work individually, the Ranches are not enabling the foals to reach their potential as team horses – like the Kaimanawa horses. And the type of feed they provide along with the exercise they give, the foals would not reach their potential weight if the owners decided to sell the horse to the butcher.'

'Horses shouldn't be used for meat!' the wife argued.

'Well, that would also be a values argument, wouldn't it?' the lawyer asked, but did not wait for a reply. 'Remember the Ranch just said potential, it would be up to the owners to decide if they want a plow horse, a fat horse to be slaughtered, a champion kicker...or a rider-less messenger.'

'You are not quite correct,' the mayor interjected. 'To enable ALL foals to reach their full potential would mean that every foal reaches their potential as a plow horse, AND a fat horse, AND a kicker, AND a rider-less messenger –AND countless other branches of learning – at the same level of competence she would have, had she just focused on any one of them.'"

I noticed my head had turned slightly to the side as I listened to Grandad speak. I could see the problem: it was obvious that the claims of the Ranch were impossible to fulfill, yet, because potential could not be measured, how could the lawyer prove it?

"Couldn't the lawyer just take one of the foals and teach them something new? This would prove that they could have learned something more but the Ranch had not taught it," I said.

"That wouldn't quite work," Grandad replied. "The Ranch could argue that the foal did not have the potential to learn that skill the day before and that the Ranch would have taught that on the same day – had the lawyer not had the foal."

"What about taking two foals – twins maybe – and sending one to Ranch while training the other one at home?" I asked.

Grandad shook his head. “That still may not work, even if you did it with twins – or if you did it with one hundred foals – because every foal is unique. Assuming the ones trained at home did better, maybe they had more potential than the Ranch-trained foals. And, ironically, if you deprive a test subject of potentially beneficial treatment, it is considered unethical.”

“Why is that ironic?” I wondered.

“Because for years, gifted horses were deprived of the mental and physical stimulation they needed – they were treated unethically - and nothing was ever said.”

“So what did the lawyer do?” I asked.

“This is the greatest irony,” Grandad smiled. “You were on to something when you mentioned testing foals that were trained at home. In a system that only used strength tests to measure success, the lawyer used Ranch policy to prove that Ranches were failing.”

“What Ranch policy?” I asked.

“Remember when your dad’s owner first met with the head trainer?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “The head trainer told Dad’s owner that the Ranches were designed to have all foals reach their full potential.”

“Right, right,” Grandad nodded slowly, leaning toward me. “And do you remember what the head trainer said about the owners who chose not to send their foals to the Ranch?”

I thought for a moment, “I think he said that they were making a mistake and should be held accountable for lowering the quality of breeding stock.”

“You are a good student!” Grandad’s approval made my heart swell with pride.

He continued, “Well, the PTG agreed with the head trainer, and they passed a policy – a law, actually - which allowed owner’s to train their foals at home. BUT – and this is what the lawyer used against the PTG later – if foals who were trained at home did not meet minimum standards – standards set by the PTG, the owners were to be warned and required to develop a plan to improve their training.”

“And if the foals still didn’t meet the PTG standards?” I asked.

“The owner’s privilege of home-training was revoked and the owners were forced to send their foals to Ranch,” Grandad replied.

I was confused. “I’m sorry Grandad,” I said, “I still don’t really see what this has to do with the lawyer and with Dad.

“Like it is for you, the answer was so obvious that it had been overlooked by everyone!” Grandad explained. “The lawyer simply asked the courts to apply the same standard to Ranches as the PTG applied to home-trainers. Foals trained in the Ranches were to be strength tested, and if foals did not meet PTG standards, the Ranches would be required to make changes.”

“Hmmm,” I pondered what Grandad was saying.

“What are you thinking?” Grandad asked me.

“Well, two things,” I began slowly. “First, strength tests have nothing to do with testing if foals reached their potential – even if all the foals met the minimum strength requirements, it does not prove they reached their potential. And second, the lawyer was taking quite a big risk – what if all the foals who were trained at the Ranch did pull the required weight? He would look like a fool.”

“Great observations!” Grandad exclaimed. “You are correct on both counts. The strength tests had nothing to do with potential, but it was all they had. And yes, the lawyer did take a big chance by asking the courts to make the PTG live up to the standards it imposed on home-trainers – especially since the standards of minimum strength requirements were lower than the promise of potential. But the gamble paid off – around half of the foals failed to meet the PTG’s standards. Following the PTG’s own procedures with home-trainers, the courts told the PTG that the Ranches had to come up with a plan to improve, or they would be shut down.”

“So what did the PTG do? What plan did they come up with?” I asked. This was getting intense!

But before Grandad could answer, I heard a gate squeak as it was opened. My heart sank as I realized my owner’s daughter was coming to get me to take me home.

“I’ll give you a hint,” Grandad quickly whispered. “It had something to do with the rolled up piece of paper the mayor had brought with him.”

Chapter 13: The Final Days

The following week, as usual, my owner's daughter saddled me up and leapt onto me for the journey to Grandad's owner's farm. The sky was dark grey, and it had rained all night so the air was warm and muggy. As we passed through the gate to the farm, Grandad's owner was waiting outside of his house; he gestured for my owner's daughter to come over to him. She slid off of me and tethered me to a post before walking over to him. I could only hear part of their conversation.

"What's wrong?" my owner's daughter asked.

"He can't walk anymore, he is in a lot of pain," the man answered.

Then there was some whispering I could not quite make out, and my owner's daughter looked back at me a few times.

Then the man said something I could barely make out: "We were going to do it this morning, but it was too muddy – the truck couldn't get in there."

The girl said something I could not hear.

"Tomorrow," he said.

The girl turned and slowly walked back toward me. As she untied me, I noticed her eyes were red. Instead of mounting me, she just led me down to the barn. The walk took longer than usual as she struggled to get her footing in the deep mud. When we got to the entrance of the barn, she took off my saddle and my bridle, but did not brush me. Unusually, she just rubbed my nose and then turned to go back to the house before saying, "He's in his stall."

I slowly walked to Grandad's stall. The door was open and before I saw him, I could once again hear his loud, raspy breathing – even worse than it had been several weeks before. I edged into his stall and saw him against the back wall, lying on his left side on a pile of straw. His sides were sunken and he looked as if he had not eaten since I had seen him seven days earlier.

"Grandad," I said, as I nudged him in the neck with my nose.

He did not move. His stomach went up and down slightly with each raspy breath.

"Grandad," I said a bit louder as I tapped his hoof with mine.

He did not wake up. I lay down beside him, close enough that I could rub his muzzle with my own – hoping he would know I was there. I looked at his ragged lips and dry cracked

nose. His eyes were fully closed this time, and, in spite of the fact that flies were crawling in and around them, his ears were still.

I looked at his frail body. His grey mane lay limply on his greyish-white crest. He had become so thin, I could count his ribs as his torso slightly expanded and contracted with each shallow breath. His legs were obviously weak and they would twitch from time to time as if he were pulling a plow in a dream. His tail was grey like his mane – it, too, lay lifeless on the straw.

As I looked at the old horse, I thought about his sire – coming from the East with nothing and helping his owners settle this area. I thought about Grandad as he went to Ranch and got picked on because he was weaker than the other foals. And I thought about how Grandad must have felt as he watched his offspring get terrorized by trainers and foals as they called him ‘Special’ just because he was gifted. Suddenly, I felt sick and did not want to go to Ranch next week.

I rested my head on Grandad’s shoulder. As I closed my eyes, I felt a warm drip run down my face.

Just as I was about to doze off I heard a weak voice,

“Hey, fat-head? You are heavy!”

Startled, I sprang to my feet, “Grandad?”

I looked down at the old horse; nothing in his appearance had changed except his eyes were now open. Without moving he said, “Lie down close. I can’t speak very loud. I want to finish my story.”

I lay down with my ears near to his lips and said, “Grandad, just rest, you don’t have to finish.”

He quietly whispered, “I have to finish: you don’t know what you don’t know, you know?”

“I guess that makes sense,” I replied.

“I will have to skip a lot, okay?”

I nodded.

“The rolled up piece of paper the mayor had brought with him was the poster that had briefly hung in his office. Remember? The one that said, ‘To enable ALL foals to reach their potential, we will...’”

“I remember,” I nodded again, so Grandad continued.

“The lawyer had already proved that many foals at the Ranches were failing to meet minimum strength standards. Based on the laws the PTG had designed for home-training, this meant that the PTG had to come up with a plan to improve or the Ranches would be shut down. The lawyer argued that the improvement plan for Ranches should be the plan the PTG had laid out for themselves when they amended the purpose – the items on the poster.”

Grandad paused and closed his eyes as he caught his breath. After a few moments, he opened his eyes and went on telling the story, “Mr. Wright argued that the PTG had done all they could afford to do; the cost of enabling all foals to reach their potential was beyond their means. The lawyer pointed out that nowhere in the PTG documents was *ALL* or *full potential* bound by limited resources. Additionally, the lawyer cited numerous cases in which the PTG had required home-trainers to improve results – and even forced some foals to go to Ranch – without considering the limited resources of the owner.”

Grandad took a breath and then continued. “He also showed how elite training programs – like ones created for horses training for the Olympics – did not use same-age inclusive grouping. They individualized training with specialized trainers and training programs...”

“...Just like the actions listed on the poster.” As soon as I spoke I felt bad for interrupting, but Grandad didn’t seem to mind.

“That’s right,” he said. “This whole process took several years. It started the year after your dad left Ranch...in fact, when your dad did not work out as a rider-less messenger, the lawyer had to sell your dad to help pay for the case – he did not get much for your dad, though. The owner wanted a plow horse, and your dad was never much of a plow horse. He was sold several more times in the next couple of years.”

Grandad stopped to gather himself again and then added, “It was last year that the Ranch foals failed the strength tests. The results were released around the time you started to come visit me this spring. The judge reprimanded the PTG for promising owners that their foals would reach their potential when they already knew they could not afford to keep this promise. But, in keeping with the PTG policy concerning home-trainers, the judge gave the PTG a second chance.”

“A second chance to do what?” I asked, looking up at Grandad’s eyes.

“To do what they had promised – they have to start following their own requirements – the ones they had written on the poster that would enable ALL foals to reach their potential.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

He replied quietly, “It means that next week when you go to Ranch, they will provide all the things the head trainer had promised your dad’s owner before he went to Ranch.”

For a moment I was elated – this meant I would have a trainer specifically trained in the area my owners want me to be trained in; feed that is perfect for my body type and training goals; new equipment...but then I remembered...

“But Grandad, what about what the accountant said: he said it would bankrupt the system and all the Ranches would shut down and all the mayors would lose their jobs.”

“Yes, that *is* what he said,” Grandad said softly, and he fell asleep.

Chapter 14: The Collapse

The following week, my owner's daughter saddled me up and rode me to town. My owner dropped her off at school before dropping me off at Ranch. At that time we were still using the old Ranch because the construction of the new Ranch was not yet completed. And no wonder! My owner and I had passed by the new Ranch a few days before, and it was huge and extravagant – it had everything!

In spite of Ranch taking place in the old building, there had been lots of changes over the summer – many more trainers, new equipment, and feed troughs were replaced by individual feedbags – all containing different types of high quality feed. When I was dropped off, my owner told the level 1 supervisor (there were now so many level 1 trainers, they needed a supervisor to oversee them), that he was looking forward to me reaching my full potential, and that he wanted me to specialize in equestrian jumping (Owners still did not understand that all foals would reach their full potential in all disciplines – saying *specialize* was redundant – we would specialize in everything).

Ranch buzzed with activities and programs; there were trainers and foals everywhere. Because the old Ranch was not big enough to properly train the foals in all disciplines, the courts gave the PTG a written warning to comply or be shut down. We moved into the new Ranch the following week.

I was training non-stop. The equestrian jumping trainer took me through rigorous drills. After the arduous training, the trainer allowed me to get a quick drink of water before he strapped a feedbag on me. I munched on the specially designed blend of feed as the jumping trainer led me to the pasture for some well-needed rest. As soon as the swimming trainer saw me in the pasture, however, he would take me to the pool for training and then strap a feedbag with different food onto my muzzle. Before I could leave the aquatic area, the teamwork trainer would come to get me to work in a group, but then the jumping trainer saw me and said I was late for my workout. As I left Ranch for the day, the weight gain coach strapped a particularly large feedbag on me and told my owner I had to finish it before I went to sleep that night. By the time I finished my feed and was allowed to sleep, it was usually near midnight. By the end of the first week, I was exhausted!

After about two years, I was physically and mentally drained from dawn-to-dusk training, and I was often sick. I noticed something else: we all still did plow training, but upon

graduation, no one was being used as a plow horse. When I pointed this out to my mom, she said, “None of the foals are being used as plow horses when they grow up because none of the farmers use horse-drawn plows anymore, they all use tractors.”

“So why do we still do plow training?” I asked.

She thought for a moment and then replied, “Hmmm, I guess it is because the Ranches said they would enable you to reach your full potential...and that would include full potential as a plow horse. Or maybe it is because that is what they have always taught at Ranch. Who knows?”

By half way through year two (there were no longer levels because the training was individualized), I had noticed something else: there were fewer and fewer foals at Ranch. I wondered if more mares had gotten sick – like what happened when I was a suckling. I found out later that many owners were closing down their shops in town, or selling their farms, and moving away.

My owners moved away, too. I heard them tell our neighbors that they could no longer afford to live in this region. But before they moved away, they sold me. From the time I was two and a half, until the time I was seven, I had six different owners as each one moved away. Sometimes I went to Ranch, sometimes I didn’t. Around the time I turned six, no one went to Ranch anymore, it had shut down. The accountant may have been a weasel, but he was right.

The towns in the region all went bankrupt. The mayors all lost their jobs. The new mayors agreed to disband the PTG and create a new educational system for foals. One of the new mayors asked, “If no one uses plow horses anymore, why are we training foals to be plow horses?”

In attempting to answer the new mayor’s question, the discussion quickly went to the question that was at the heart of the issue – the answer to which would become the foundation for all policies and programs. The answer would also determine what is just, fair, and equitable. The question the mayors needed to answer was, of course, *what is the purpose of education?* As they debated the answer to this question, one thing the mayors had learned from their predecessors, if they couldn’t afford to implement their answer, they did not have an answer.

My filly is obviously ecstatic about the answer the mayors came up with. She is clearly motivated and learning, so I cannot complain. I am sincerely happy for her. For me, however, it is too late. My years in the *potential* Ranch, along with my many moves and many owners, have

left me worn out and jaded. Maybe if the PTG would have done things differently? Maybe if they had been more willing to change, before change was forced upon them? Maybe if they would have been realistic instead of trying to save their own jobs? Lying on my bed of straw, I feel old, and weak, and drained. So many questions. So many regrets. I close my eyes and think of my daughter. I fall asleep.

Chapter 15: The Challenge

“Daddy! Dad! Dad!” my snow-white filly whinnies as she gallops into the barn. I awaken from my afternoon nap.

But when she comes around the corner and I catch a glimpse of her size, I am reminded, once again, that she is no longer a filly. Now nearly six years old, she is a full grown mare, healthy and strong. While she is still extremely energetic and lively, she has learned to restrain herself – I am thankful for that! Her sturdy frame and muscular body would surely kill me if she were to crash into me like she used to do. Instead, she trots up to my stall and softly rubs her muzzle against mine.

I have been fortunate to be able to watch my filly grow into this magnificent horse. For two very different reasons, I think, our owner has kept us both. They have likely kept my daughter because she is valuable breeding stock, and me...I like to think they have kept me because I am a very smooth horse to ride, especially for the owner's children – I am gentle and I can still avoid loose stones. I think the main reason they haven't sold me, however, is because no one wants to buy me. Regardless, it has been a thrill for me to watch my filly mature and develop.

As it turns out, my fears from five years ago were unfounded. In spite of some problems along the way, the mayors had agreed on a purpose for education and had implemented a plan they could afford. The fact that the towns had gone bankrupt and the PTG had been so completely decimated turned out to be a blessing in disguise for education. The new mayors held no allegiances to any particular group or system, so they were free to create a new way to educate foals that was current, applicable, and, of course, affordable.

It all seems normal now, but the first time my filly explained it to me, it was anything but normal. Our discussion began five years ago when my filly and I met back at the feeding trough at suppertime. She had promised to tell me about her learning experiences.

“Well Daddy,” she began, “from what I am told, it started when the new mayors met together to discuss what to do about educating foals. Owners were getting frustrated because the old Ranches had shut down, many owners were moving away, lots of horses were being sold, and foals were left untrained.”

I just looked down at the trough. For my filly, these were just words from a time that, to her, never existed. For me, they brought back painful memories that I was trying hard to forget.

“The mayors all agreed that whatever actions they took, they had to be in line with the purpose of education,” she continued. “Therefore, the purpose had to come first, and then all actions would be determined and judged according to the purpose.”

“Because actions, not intentions, determine outcomes,” I interjected.

“Uh, yeah,” she sputtered, “I guess so.”

“Anyway,” she said, regaining her train of thought. “Do you know what *inquiry learning* is?”

“Not really,” I admitted. “What is inquiry learning?”

“I’m not telling,” she teased. “And before I tell you what the mayors have come up with, I want to know, what would you do?”

“What would I do about what?” I asked.

“I have heard you tell the stories of when you, Grandad, and even Great-Grandad, were at Ranch,” she said. “After all of your experiences – and if there was no existing system – what would you have done?”

“Wow!” I didn’t know what to say. To be honest, I had thought a lot about certain things I *wouldn’t* do, but I hadn’t thought much about what I would do.

“You are going to have to simplify this for me,” I responded, not only trying to get clarity, but also to buy some time. “What exactly are you asking me?”

“I’m asking you,” the young filly replied, “*what is the purpose of education?* And, once you tell me the purpose, you have to tell me how you would make it happen.”

“Unlimited resources?” I asked hopefully.

“Is there ever unlimited resources?” she answered my question with a question.

“No, I suppose not,” I said. “It just would have made things much easier.”

“You can think about it,” she said as she turned to walk away. “I am going to my stall for the night.”

I stood alone by the trough. Without me noticing, the sun had disappeared, and the stars had come out. The autumn air had suddenly become very cool, so I walked to my stable for the night. As my eyelids grew heavy and I began to fall asleep, I kept asking myself, “What *is* the purpose of education?” and “How would I make it happen?”

As odd as it may sound, as I slept, my answers came to me in a dream...